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## MEDIA ALERT

### **"New Imposter Phone Scam spoofs Utah government in solar energy scheme"**

*"Telemarketers claiming to be from Utah Public Utilities Commission, pushing solar deals"*

(For immediate release...)

**SALT LAKE CITY, Utah** - Francine A. Giani, Executive Director of the Utah Department of Commerce, announced today that the Utah Public Service Commission has received reports of a phony telemarketing scheme where callers pretend to be from a fake state government agency. According to the reports, Utah citizens are contacted by the Utah Public Utilities Commission with a solar energy sales pitch. Consumers are told there is a deadline with the government and they must act right away to receive special pricing on solar energy panels. While no agency named the "Utah Public Utilities Commission" exists in the Beehive State, Commissioners with the Utah Public Service Commission are concerned citizens may confuse this scam with the real government agency and take the bait.

"The Utah Public Service Commission does not make telemarketing calls to the public, and does not authorize anyone to do so on its behalf. Anyone who claims otherwise is simply lying," stated Thad LeVar, Chair, Utah Public Service Commission

Imposter scams are not new to the Division of Consumer Protection who reminds the public that scams such as this solar energy pitch uses common elements like government sounding names to lure the public into believing its true. Recent phony phone calls have used the IRS and other government entities to snare victims.

"Imposter scams prey on your trusting nature with convincing names and language to confuse you into thinking it's the real deal. Hang up the phone and call the real agency to verify before acting first," advised Francine A. Giani, Executive Director, Utah Department of Commerce.

### **Top 5 ways to beat a Government Imposter Scam**

#### **1. Don't wire money**

Scammers often pressure people into wiring money, or strongly suggest that people put

money on a prepaid debit card and send it to them. Why? It's like sending cash: once it's gone, you can't trace it or get it back. Never deposit a "winnings" check and wire money back, either. The check is a fake, no matter how good it looks, and you will owe the bank any money you withdraw. And don't share your account information, or send a check or money order using an overnight delivery or courier service. Con artists recommend these services so they can get your money before you realize you've been cheated.

## **2. Don't pay for a prize**

If you enter and win a legitimate sweepstakes, you don't have to pay insurance, taxes, or shipping charges to collect your prize. If you have to pay, it's not a prize. And companies, including Lloyd's of London, don't insure delivery of sweepstakes winnings.

If you didn't enter a sweepstakes or lottery, then you can't have won. Remember that it's illegal to play a foreign lottery through the mail or over the phone.

## **3. Don't give the caller your financial or other personal information**

Never give out or confirm financial or other sensitive information, including your bank account, credit card, or Social Security number, unless you know who you're dealing with. Scam artists, like fake debt collectors, can use your information to commit identity theft — charging your existing credit cards, opening new credit card, checking, or savings accounts, writing fraudulent checks, or taking out loans in your name. If you get a call about a debt that may be legitimate — but you think the collector may not be — contact the company you owe money to about the calls.

## **4. Don't trust a name or number**

Con artists use official-sounding names to make you trust them. It's illegal for any promoter to lie about an affiliation with — or an endorsement by — a government agency or any other well-known organization. No matter how convincing their story — or their stationery — they're lying. No legitimate government official will ask you to send money to collect a prize, and they won't call to collect your debt.

To make their call seem legitimate, scammers also use internet technology to disguise their area code. So even though it may look like they're calling from Washington, DC, they could be calling from anywhere in the world.

## **5. Put your number on the National Do Not Call Registry**

Ok, so this won't stop scammers from calling. But it should make you skeptical of calls you get from out of the blue. Most legitimate sales people generally honor the Do Not Call list. Scammers ignore it. Putting your number on the list helps to "screen" your calls for legitimacy and reduce the number of legitimate telemarketing calls you get. Register your phone number at [donotcall.gov](http://donotcall.gov).

## **Report the Scam to the Federal Trade Commission**

If you get a call from a government imposter, file a complaint at [ftc.gov/complaint](http://ftc.gov/complaint). Be sure to include:

- date and time of the call
- name of the government agency the imposter used
- what they tell you, including the amount of money and the payment method they ask for
- phone number of the caller; although scammers may use technology to create a fake number or spoof a real one, law enforcement agents may be able to track that number to identify the caller
- any other details from the call

For more information or to file a complaint, log on to the Utah Division of Consumer Protection at; [www.consumerprotection.utah.gov](http://www.consumerprotection.utah.gov)

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