

South Carolina Living

FALL &
WINTER
TRAVEL
ISSUE

AIKEN ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

CEO MESSAGE

Staying safe
from scams

SC RECIPE

Tailgating
MVPs

Game day ritual

Embracing the
tailgating tradition



**Aiken Electric
Cooperative, Inc.**

aikenco-op.org

AIKEN OFFICE

2790 Wagener Road • P.O. Box 417
Aiken, SC 29802
(803) 649-6245

EDGEFIELD OFFICE

1195 Bauskett Street • P.O. Box 583
Edgefield, SC 29824

NORTH OFFICE

8381 North Road • P.O. Box 520
North, SC 29112

NEW ELLENTON OFFICE

315 Main Street
New Ellenton, SC 29809

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

President

Charles R. Sanders, Jr.

Vice President

Dana H. Moseley

Secretary/Treasurer

Linda S. Bramlett

Assistant Secretary/Treasurer

O. Frank Dorn

Robert Curry

Vincent W. Furtick, Jr.

Adam Livingston

Scott B. Riddle

J. Strom Thurmond, Jr.

Timothy Watkins

The mission of Aiken Electric Cooperative, Inc. is to empower communities by providing reliable, competitively priced energy and other services desired by our membership.

CO-OP NEWS EDITOR

Jamacia McCray
jmccray@aikenco-op.org

AEC is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



By staying informed, remaining cautious and reporting suspected scams, you can help stop scammers.

Staying safe from scams

SCAMMERS ARE FINDING NEW, advanced ways of tricking people, making it difficult to tell the difference between legitimate and fraudulent messages. Whether it is a text message that appears personalized, a phone call from a local number, someone posing as a cooperative employee, or even a look-alike website, scammers are using convincing tactics to gain your trust in an attempt to steal your money or personal information.

Utility scams often involve false promises of refunds or discounts, offers to restore power quickly in exchange for immediate payment or individuals claiming to represent the cooperative. They may create a sense of urgency by threatening immediate disconnection or demanding payment within minutes or hours. They also frequently request payment through unusual methods such as cryptocurrency, prepaid debit cards, gift cards or third-party payment apps like CashApp or Venmo.

Remember, Aiken Electric Cooperative will never demand payment using these methods. If your account is past due, we will attempt to contact you and work with you to find a solution.

If you receive a suspicious call, text or visit, take a moment to slow down and verify the information before taking any action. If something feels unexpected or creates unnecessary panic, do not share your personal or payment information and end the conversation. Then contact us using the phone number printed on your bill or listed on our official website to confirm whether the communication is legitimate. You may also consider saving our number as a contact in your phone—(803) 649-6245. Our mobile app is also an authorized, convenient and easy way to make payments.

Tip: Rather than relying on search engine results, type Aiken Electric's web address—**aikenco-op.org**—directly into the address bar. Better yet, bookmark the website on your browser or use our official app. See page 5 to learn more about the website look-alike scam and how to protect yourself.

By staying informed, remaining cautious and reporting suspected scams, you can help stop scammers before they trick someone else.

APRIL M. COLLINS

Chief Executive Officer



When in doubt, verify

Your security is important to us

IF YOU'RE EVER unsure whether you're speaking with an Aiken Electric Cooperative employee, don't hesitate to call us at (803) 649-6245 before making a payment or sharing personal information. That is the easiest way to protect yourself from payment scams.

Is that really your co-op?

Scammers use online search results to trick co-op members

A NEW SCAM is targeting electric cooperative members across the Southeast, and some members of South Carolina co-ops have fallen victim to the scheme.

Scammers are buying and placing fake websites and phone listings at the top of search engine results as advertisements, posing as power providers in an attempt to steal members' payment information, according to the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. These fake listings could appear as sponsored results, map listings or look-alike websites.

In one instance, a co-op member searched online for his power provider and called the number displayed with one of the search results. Instead of a legitimate member services representative, he spoke with a scam artist who convinced him to send a \$400 payment. That money never reached the co-op.

A South Carolina co-op member had a similar experience. After searching online, she called the number listed and was

"We don't want members to feel like they can't pay their bill online. But in today's world, you can never be too cautious."

—**BILL INMAN**, VICE PRESIDENT OF STRATEGIC SERVICES

offered a \$20 discount to pay her power bill over the phone. Surprisingly, the scammer paid her bill, but likely only to buy time to use her card information elsewhere.

"Aiken Electric's website provides members with information and resources that we strive to keep current and reliable," says Bill Inman, vice president of Strategic Services. "Unfortunately, scammers can make fake listings appear in search results. We encourage members to type our web address directly into their browser or call the number printed on their bill."

Below are four ways to protect yourself:



SKIP THE SEARCH BAR

Rather than relying on search engine results, type Aiken Electric's web address—aikenco-op.org—directly into the address bar. Better yet, bookmark the website on your browser or use our official app.



USE THE NUMBER YOU KNOW

Call us using the phone number printed on your bill or in past correspondence, not one you find in a search engine.



BE WARY OF DEALS

We'll never offer a discount for paying over the phone.



TRUST YOUR GUT

If something seems suspicious during a call, hang up and call us directly at (803) 649-6245.

Think you've been scammed?

Aiken Electric wants members to be aware of common utility scams and recognize the warning signs of fraud.

- **Check-washing scams** Always keep an eye on your checks and monitor your bank accounts regularly. For added protection, consider using Aiken Electric's mobile app or automatic draft payment options.

- **Telephone scams** If someone contacts you claiming to represent Aiken Electric and demands immediate payment, don't provide personal or payment information. Hang up and contact Aiken Electric directly to verify the request.
- **Safe payment options** Only make payments through authorized payment systems listed on Aiken Electric's website—aikenco-op.org. When in doubt, contact us directly at (803) 649-6245 before making a payment.