

# Scam Survey: Don't Be Fooled



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**No matter how friendly they may seem, if someone comes to the door claiming to be from your co-op, be sure to ask for identification.**

**IF IT SEEMS YOU'RE CONSTANTLY** being warned about new scams, you have criminal imaginations to thank. This year, electric utilities across Texas are reporting many new twists on old scams.

## Perpetrators in Person

In March, three men approached an El Campo residence, claiming to be from Wharton County Electric Cooperative. One of the men gained entry by asking for a glass of water, while the others went to the backyard. Fortunately, a family member arrived and threatened to notify the police.

In April, El Paso Electric received calls from residents about people claiming to be contractors trimming trees near power lines. In one case, a thief distracted a resident while another entered the home to grab cash, jewelry and other valuables.

In May, two men posed as contractors for San Patricio Electric Cooperative. They visited a member's home, ostensibly to do some work on two meter loops—and then stole them!

As similar incidents happen around the state, authorities recommend using caution.

**If someone suspicious comes to your door claiming to be a co-op employee, follow these tips:**

**Do not respond aggressively** (because the visitor might be legitimate), but do not let anyone unfamiliar into your home.

**Look for identifying markers.** Electric cooperative crew members wear uniforms and drive vehicles displaying the co-op's name and logo.

**Ask for identification.** Co-op technicians carry employee ID cards, and contractors carry an official letter stating that they work for your cooperative.

**Call the co-op.** We can verify whether the visitor's vehicle was dispatched from the co-op.

**Look for red flags.** Scammers might demand immediate payment, insist that you pay with a prepaid card or try to get personal information.

**Do not give out personal information,** such as your date of birth, Social Security number or banking information.

**Do not give money.** Co-op employees will never demand payment from you at your home.

**If you determine the person is not a co-op employee,** tell them to leave, and lock the doors immediately.

**Call the police.** Give them information including a description of the individuals and their vehicle, including the license plate number.

## Phonies on the Phone

Scammers also work via telephone. They call a member with claims of an overdue account and threaten disconnection unless immediate payment is made. Recognize this tactic as a red flag.

You might legitimately receive a courtesy call from the co-op to notify you if your account is overdue, but a co-op employee will never demand immediate payment over the phone.

If you get such a call, do not be afraid of threats—and do not give out personal information. Instead, ask for a number where you can call them back. Then hang up and notify the co-op. You can also call the police and give them any information you collected from the scammer.

## Wrongs on the Web

Scammers similarly target members online. They email a co-op member saying that the electric bill is overdue, and disconnection can be avoided by immediate payment. They provide a link to a third-party website, which will accept the member's payment—for a "small additional fee." These websites are not affiliated with the co-op, and payments made through these sources cannot be guaranteed.

Your cooperative will not email you to collect payment online. Even if you initiate a payment, it is unusual for electric cooperatives to charge members for making payments via the co-op's website or through the SmartHub app.

Do not click on links included in emails sent to you by people or organizations claiming to be acting on the co-op's behalf, even if the email looks legitimate. Delete the email and notify your co-op.



Some prefer to freeze food for storage, while others say canning is best.

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# Canning or Freezing?

**ONE OF THE JOYS OF SUMMER** is growing and picking the fruits and vegetables we've grown in the garden. But when it comes to preserving the bounty, there is one timeless question: Which is better, canning or freezing?

The answer is: It depends—on variables like preference, time, space and the type of food. But there are other variables that perhaps are worth mentioning, too.

## Which has a smaller energy footprint?

Canning involves boiling jars of food to sterilize and seal them, requiring a one-shot—though considerable—burst of energy use. Freezing food requires a long-term consumption of continuous electricity, and the longer you store the food, the more it costs.

A 1980 academic study published in the *Journal of Food Science* calculated the energy use for processing and storing 50 pounds of vegetables. The study determined that freezing them for six months used about three times as much energy as canning them.

However, it's hard to extrapolate this information to today's numbers. New freezers use a third of the electricity used by freezers in 1980, while electricity costs about 2½ times as much as it did then. The numbers also vary significantly depending on whether the freezer is full or not. Also, chest freezers are twice as efficient as uprights, so the difference can greatly affect electricity use.

A more recent analysis concludes that freezing uses 15 times as much electricity and costs four times as much per pound as canning, once the cost of the equipment is factored in.

## Which method has a smaller physical footprint?

Another source, *The Natural Canning Resource Book*, made a couple of relevant points about the issue besides energy use.

Availability of resources is an important factor in the equation: If you often deal with outages or other power disruptions, canned food keeps a lot better than thawed-and-refrozen food. If you live in a small space, or if you're a renter rather than an owner, it's a lot easier to store and move canned food than it is to store and move a freezer.

Finally, the issue of taste: *The Journal of Food Science* study found that people preferred the taste of frozen food over canned by a huge margin. Whatever method you use, the end result is that you want people to eat it and like it.

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Operating in Brown, Callahan, Coleman, Coke, Concho, Runnels, Taylor and Tom Green counties

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## Power Tip

Use toaster ovens or convection ovens for small meals rather than your conventional stove or oven. A toaster or convection oven uses one-third to one-half as much energy as a full-sized oven.