



## ***PRESS RELEASE***

### **OKALOOSA COUNTY WATER AND SEWER ONLINE BILL PAY DOWN**

### **FOR EXTERNAL SECURITY BREACH INQUIRY**

### **For Immediate Release**

**FORT WALTON BEACH:** The Okaloosa County Water and Sewer Department announces that a possible security breach has occurred involving external vendors which process electronic credit/debit card payments for water and sewer bills. In the past few business days, several local banks have alerted the County to unauthorized charges on cards used to pay county water bills. These reports have raised a concern that the online payment system may have been breached.

The County takes the security of our customers' information very seriously; therefore, this notice is being given while we continue to work with vendors, financial institutions and law enforcement officials to investigate the matter, the ***online system will be shut down***. Upon learning of the potential breach, the County immediately engaged the provider of the online payment software to conduct their investigation and take appropriate action.

County Information Technology staff independently ran forensic analysis on the system and there is no indication a breach has occurred on the county system. In addition, the Inspector General's Office provided a review. In an abundance of caution, it was agreed the system would be disabled and the County would engage a cyber security expert to conduct further forensic analysis. Once we are confident that the system is completely secure, the online bill payment system will be restored.

"At the present time, it appears the breach of debit/credit card data occurred outside of the county's bill payment system, but until the outside vendor(s) are certain our customer's financial information is secure we don't want to put our customers in any jeopardy in paying bills online" commented John Hofstad, County Administrator.

"The security of our customers' information is of the utmost importance. We are on top of this! We are taking all necessary steps to investigate any potential breaches and restore the online payment system as soon as possible. We regret any inconvenience; however it's just the world we live in today. With smart technology comes even smarter crooks" said Okaloosa County Commission Chairman Graham Fountain.

Updates will be issued when additional information becomes available.

#### **Who may be affected:**

Currently individuals who used the County's website to make online credit/debit card payments may have been victims. This does not appear to have affected those who use autopay with checking/savings account information or their checking/savings account to make a one-time payment.

#### **You can still pay your water and sewer bill by:**

- 1) Use the automated Voice Utility System to pay your bill by phone (850) 651-7171 using an eCheck, Visa Debit/Credit Card, Mastercard Debit/Credit Card, American Express or Discover Card.
- 2) Mail check or money order made payable to O.C.W.S. (no cash please) with the top portion of your utility bill to: O.C.W.S. 1804 Lewis Turner Boulevard, Suite 300 Fort Walton Beach, FL 32547-1266

3) Pay in person with cash, check, money order, or Visa Debit/Credit Card, Mastercard Debit/Credit Card, American Express or Discover Card during business hours at one of the offices.

4) Payment drop boxes are located at both of our offices for after hour's convenience. All payment drops are picked up on scheduled business days. Weekend or Holiday drop payments will be applied to your account on the next scheduled business day.

5) Pay automatically each month by using Electronic Funds Transfer. You will still receive a monthly statement. The amount due showing on your bill will be automatically deducted from your bank account on the due date. There's nothing to remember or worry about. To request this service please stop by any of our offices to process the application. You will need to bring a cancelled check.

6) For our customers who have signed up for automatic monthly credit/debit card water bill payments: This service has been disabled until further notice. Those customers currently using automatic monthly credit/debit card payments will need to make arrangements to switch to automatic monthly bank drafting or begin to make individual monthly payments using one of the other available payment methods already described.

### **What you can do to help:**

If you have used your card to make a one-time payment online or have enrolled in autopay using your debit/credit card to pay your Okaloosa County water bill through the County website, please:

1. Check your credit card account for unauthorized or suspicious charges, no matter how small.
2. Report any unauthorized charges to your credit card issuer/bank immediately.
3. Ask your credit card issuer/bank to deactivate your card and issue a new card.
4. Request a fraud alert to be placed on your credit file. A fraud alert tells creditors to contact you before they open any new accounts or change your existing accounts. You may call any one of the three major credit bureaus listed below. As soon as one credit bureau confirms your fraud alert, the others are notified to place fraud alerts. The initial fraud alert stays on your credit report for 90 days. You can renew it after 90 days.
5. Request that all three credit reports be sent to you, free of charge, for your review. Even if you do not find any suspicious activity on your initial credit reports, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) recommends that you check your credit reports regularly. Thieves may hold stolen information to use at various times. Checking your credit reports periodically can help you spot problems and address them quickly.

Equifax: Equifax.com or 1-800-525-6285

Experian: Experian.com or 1-888-397-3742

TransUnion: Transunion.com or 1-800-680-7289

**For further information about your Water & Sewer Account please contact:**

Okaloosa County Water & Sewer Department (850) 651-7171

**Media inquiries relating to this Press Release please contact:**

Greg Kisela, Deputy County Administrator, at (850) 689-5050

or email at [managerinfo@co.okaloosa.fl.us](mailto:managerinfo@co.okaloosa.fl.us)