

Dangers of Meter Tampering

Date : 04/27/2018

You might be surprised at the number of different departments at the Brownsville Public Utilities Board (BPUB). One of those departments is critical to ensuring the safe, responsible use of BPUB services and to recovering revenue losses as a result of unauthorized use. The Revenue Recovery Department keeps a close eye on BPUB accounts to make sure that the community's investment is being protected.

Meter Tampering

Meter tampering is a serious problem that every utility faces. This is the unauthorized tampering of a meter to alter the way it operates. There are many different ways that people can tamper with meters, but all of those ways are theft.

Dangers of Meter Tampering

Tampering with an electric meter can create a fire or can result in injury or death from electrocution. Electricity and electrical equipment is always potentially dangerous, and only professionals should be working on that type of equipment. Improper handling of an electrical meter could leave the meter in an unsafe condition that will eventually result in fire. Tampering with a water meter can create a health hazard by allowing a contaminant to enter a water line, which could result in illness.

Identifying Meter Tampering

This is where the Revenue Recovery Department comes in. This department is trained to identify cases of meter tampering. This can be done in a few different ways. Through its billing system, BPUB keeps records of account usage. If there are irregularities in a customer's billing statement, this can send up red flags. Most customers are fairly consistent in their usage, depending on the time of year. A sudden drop in electrical or water consumption can be a sign that something isn't right.

In that event, someone from the Revenue Recovery team will investigate the issue. These technicians will test the meters to ensure they are operating correctly. They are also trained to visually identify the various ways that people will try to bypass their meters.

Costly Consequences

If a customer is caught tampering with a meter, the first thing that can be expected is for the Brownsville Police Department to be called and for the meter to be replaced at the cost of the customer. An unauthorized access fee is also assessed, and that's just the beginning of the fees. Depending on the type of meter, there are several more fees that will be levied against the customer. These fees can quickly add up to hundreds of dollars. Don't forget the electricity or water that was stolen. BPUB has a right to recover revenue lost as a

result of meter tampering. BPUB's Revenue Recovery staff can determine exactly how much consumption wasn't measured, and the customer is responsible for paying the difference. Depending on how long the meter tampering is determined to have been going on, BPUB can backbill as far as four years back.

These actions can result in:

- Disconnection of services
- Additional fees
- Penalties
- Police report
- Criminal prosecution

What Can You Do?

Remember that meter tampering affects all BPUB customers. The cost of electricity, water and wastewater services must be made up somewhere – even if some people are stealing those services. That could mean higher costs for the rest of us.

Keep an eye out for some of these red flags:

- A person other than a BPUB employee working on a meter.
- A person other than a BPUB employee digging near underground lines or tampering with overhead power lines.
- A cut or missing meter seal.
- A meter missing from the socket while the lights, heat or air conditioning are being used.
- A meter socket with additional hardware, tools or wiring added to it.

Anonymous tips from customers are important to investigating potential energy or water theft. If you notice any suspicious activity, call the Meter Tampering Hotline at 956-983-6600. You can also report suspected meter tampering through the BPUB website. Just go to the homepage and click on the button marked "Report Fraud." Remember that your report will be kept confidential.