



Town of Columbus

PO BOX 146 · Columbus, NC 28722

Identity Theft Prevention “Red Flags” Policy

- 1) The Town of Columbus's Public Utilities Department ("Utility") developed this Identity Theft Prevention Policy pursuant to the Federal Trade Commission's Red Flags Rule, which implements Section 114 of the Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions Act of 2003-16 C.F.R. §681.2. This Policy was developed with oversight and approval of the Town Council of the Town of Columbus ("Council"). After consideration of the size and complexity of the Utility's operations and account systems, and the nature and scope of the Utility's activities, the Council determined that this Policy was appropriate for the Town's Public Utilities Department.
- 2) Under the Red Flag Rule, every financial institution and creditor is required to establish an "Identity Theft Prevention Policy" tailored to its size, complexity and the nature of its operation. Each policy must contain reasonable requirements and procedures to:
 - a) Identify relevant Red Flags for new and existing covered accounts and incorporate those Red Flags into the policy
 - b) Detect Red Flags that have been incorporated into the policy
 - c) Respond appropriately to any Red Flags that are detected to prevent and mitigate Identity Theft
 - d) Ensure the Policy is updated periodically, to reflect changes in risks to customers or to the safety and soundness of the creditor from Identity Theft
- 3) The Red Flags Rule Definitions:
 - a) "Identity Theft" as "fraud committed using the identifying information of another person"
 - b) "Red Flag" as a pattern, practice, or specific activity that indicates the possible existence of Identity Theft.
 - c) According to the Rule, a municipal utility is a creditor subject to the Rule requirements.
 - d) The Rule defines creditors as an entity “that regularly and in the ordinary course of business:
 - i) Obtains or uses consumer reports, directly or indirectly, in connection with a credit transaction
 - ii) Furnishes information to consumer reporting agencies in connection with a credit transaction
 - iii) Advances funds to or on behalf of a person, based on an obligation of the person to repay the funds or repayable from specific property pledged by or on behalf of the person. All the Utility's accounts that are individual utility service accounts held by customers of the utility whether residential, commercial or industrial are covered by the Rule.
 - e) Under the Rule, a "covered account" is:
 - i) Any account the Utility offers or maintains primarily for personal, family or household purposes, that involves multiple payments or transactions
 - ii) Any other account the Utility offers or maintains for which there is a reasonably foreseeable risk to customers or to the safety and soundness of the Utility from Identity Theft



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- f) The Rule defines "Identifying information" as "any name or number that may be used, alone or in conjunction with any other information, to identify a specific person," including: name, address, telephone number, social security number, date of birth, government issued driver's license or identification number, alien registration number, government passport number, employer or taxpayer identification number, unique electronic identification number, computer's Internet Protocol address, or routing code.
- 4) In order to identify relevant Red Flags, the Utility considers the types of accounts that it offers and maintains, the methods it provides to open its accounts, the methods it provides to access its accounts, and its previous experiences with Identity Theft. The Utility identifies the following red flags, in each of the listed categories:
- a) Notifications and Warnings from Credit Reporting Agencies Red Flags
 - i) Report of fraud accompanying a credit report
 - ii) Notice or report from a credit agency of a credit freeze on a customer or applicant
 - iii) Notice or report from a credit agency of an active duty alert for an applicant
 - iv) Indication from a credit report of activity that is inconsistent with a customer's usual pattern or activity.
 - b) Suspicious Documents Red Flags
 - i) Identification document or card that appears to be forged, altered or inauthentic
 - ii) Identification document or card on which a person's photograph or physical description is not consistent with the person presenting the document
 - iii) Other document with information that is not consistent with existing customer information (such as if a person's signature on a check appears forged)
 - iv) Application for service that appears to have been altered or forged
 - c) Suspicious Personal Identifying Information Red Flags
 - i) Identifying information presented that is inconsistent with other information the customer provides (example: inconsistent birth dates)
 - ii) Identifying information presented that is inconsistent with other sources of information (for instance, an address not matching an address on a credit report)
 - iii) Identifying information presented that is the same as information shown on other applications that were found to be fraudulent
 - iv) Identifying information presented that is consistent with fraudulent activity (such as an invalid phone number or fictitious billing address)
 - v) Social security number presented that is the same as one given by another customer
 - vi) An address or phone number presented that is the same as that of another person
 - vii) A person fails to provide complete personal identifying information on an application when reminded to do so (however, by law social security numbers must not be required)
 - viii) A person's identifying information is not consistent with the information that is on file for the customer



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- d) Suspicious Account Activity or Unusual Use of Account Red Flags
 - i) Change of address for an account followed by a request to change the account holder's name
 - ii) Payments stop on an otherwise consistently up-to-date account
 - iii) Account used in a way that is not consistent with prior use (example: very high activity)
 - iv) Mail sent to the account holder is repeatedly returned as undeliverable
 - v) Notice to the Utility that a customer is not receiving mail sent by the Utility
 - vi) Notice to the Utility that an account has unauthorized activity
 - vii) Breach in the Utility's computer system security
 - viii) Unauthorized access to or use of customer account information
 - e) Alerts From Others Red Flags
 - i) Notice to the Utility from a customer, identity theft victim, law enforcement or other person that it has opened or is maintaining a fraudulent account for a person engaged in Identity Theft
- 5) Detecting Red Flags
- a) New Accounts - In order to detect any of the Red Flags identified above associated with the opening of a new account, Utility personnel will take the following steps to obtain and verify the identity of the person opening the account:
 - i) Require certain identifying information such as name, date of birth, residential or business address, principal place of business for an entity, driver's license or other identification
 - ii) Verify the customer's identity (for instance, review a driver's license or other identification card)
 - iii) Review documentation showing the existence of a business entity
 - iv) Independently contact the customer
 - b) Existing Accounts - In order to detect any of the Red Flags identified above for an existing account, Utility personnel will take the following steps to monitor transactions with an accounts:
 - i) Verify the identification of customers if they request information (in person, via telephone, via facsimile, via email)
 - ii) Verify the validity of requests to change billing addresses
 - iii) Verify changes in banking information given for billing and payment purposes
- 6) In the event Utility personnel detect any identified Red Flags, such personnel shall take one or more of the following steps, depending on the degree of risk posed by the Red Flag:
- a) Preventing and Mitigating Identity Theft
 - i) Continue to monitor an account for evidence of Identity Theft
 - ii) Contact the customer
 - iii) Change any passwords or other security devices that permit access to accounts
 - iv) Do not open a new account
 - v) Close an existing account
 - vi) Reopen an account with a new number
 - vii) Notify the Policy Administrator for determination of the appropriate step(s) to take



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- viii) Notify law enforcement
- ix) Determine that no further response is warranted under the particular circumstances
- b) Protecting Customer Identifying Information - In order to further prevent the likelihood of identity theft occurring with respect to Utility accounts, the Utility will take the following steps with respect to its internal operating procedures to protect customer identifying information:
 - i) Ensure that its website is secure or provide clear notice that the website is not secure
 - ii) Ensure complete and secure destruction of paper documents and computer files containing customer information
 - iii) Ensure that office computers are password protected and that computer screens lock after a set period of time
 - iv) Keep offices clear of papers containing customer information
 - v) Request only the last 4 digits of social security numbers (if any)
 - vi) Ensure computer virus protection is up to date
 - vii) Require and keep only the kinds of customer information that are necessary for utility purposes
- 7) This policy will be periodically reviewed and updated to reflect changes in risks to customers and the soundness of the Utility from Identity Theft. At least annually, the policy Administrator will consider the Utility's experiences with Identity Theft situation, changes in Identity Theft methods, changes in Identity Theft detection and prevention methods, changes in types of accounts the Utility maintains and changes in the Utility's business arrangements with other entities. After considering these factors, the policy Administrator will determine whether changes to the policy, including the listing of Red Flags, are warranted. If warranted, the policy Administrator will update the policy or present the Council with his or her recommended changes and the Council will make a determination of whether to accept, modify or reject those changes to the policy.
- 8) Responsibility for developing, implementing and updating this policy lies with an Identity Theft Committee for the Utility. The Committee is headed by a Policy Administrator who shall be the Town Manager. Two or more other individuals appointed by the Policy Administrator comprise the remainder of the committee membership. The Policy Administrator will be responsible for the Policy administration, for ensuring appropriate training of Utility staff on the Policy, for reviewing any staff reports regarding the detection of Red Flags and the steps for preventing and mitigating Identity Theft, determining which steps of prevention and mitigation should be taken in particular circumstances and considering periodic changes to the Policy.
- 9) Utility staff responsible for implementing the Policy shall be trained either by or under the direction of the Policy Administrator in the detection of Red Flags, and the responsive steps to be taken when a Red Flag is detected. At least annually, Utility Staff shall submit a written report to the Policy Administrator on incidents of Identity Theft, the Utility's compliance with the Policy and the effectiveness of the Policy



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- 10) In the event the Utility engages a service provider to perform an activity in connection with one or more accounts, the Utility will take the following steps to ensure the service provider performs its activity in accordance with reasonable policies and procedures designed to detect, prevent, and mitigate the risk of Identity Theft:
 - a) Require, by contract, that service providers have such policies and procedures in place
 - b) Require, by contract, that service providers review the Utility's Policy and report any Red Flags to the Policy Administrator

- 11) For the effectiveness of Identity Theft prevention, the Red Flag Rule envisions a degree of confidentiality regarding the Utility's specific practices relating to Identity Theft detection, prevention and mitigation. Therefore, under this Policy, knowledge of such specific practices is to be limited to the Identity Theft Committee and those employees who need to know them for purposes of preventing Identity Theft. Because this Policy is to be adopted by a public body and thus publicly available, it would be counterproductive to list these specific practices here. Therefore, only the Policy's general red flag detection, implementation and prevention practices are listed in this document.