

Origin Energy email scam targets tens of thousands of Aussies with fake bill



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A hoax Origin Energy bill loaded with dangerous spyware has targeted tens of thousands of Australians.

The well-crafted email branded with the energy provider's official logo claimed to be an electricity bill for varying amounts, with one sighted by Fairfax Media as high as \$911.

Checklist to avoid being scammed

Consumer Protection's guide to avoid becoming the victim of a scam.

The scam was sent from servers in France and began reaching Australian email addresses about 8.30am on Wednesday morning.

According to cyber security firm MailGuard, the emails contained dangerous software designed to spy on a victim's computer once they clicked on the email's "view bill" link.

----- Forwarded message -----
 From: Origin Energy <noreply@originenergysolar.net>
 Date: 10 May 2017 at 08:44
 Subject: Your Origin electricity bill
 To: [REDACTED]



The scam email sent to tens of thousands of Australians on Wednesday morning.

In an attempt to deceive recipients, the fake bill contains a link to the legitimate privacy page on the Origin website and was designed to adapt to both mobile and computer screens.

But the scammers left several clues, including a 1300 customer-service number registered to a recycling business in Pinewood, Victoria.

The email was also sent from "originenergysolar.net", a domain registered in China just days ago.

MailGuard CEO Craig McDonald said bill hoaxes were on the rise.

"Increasingly we're seeing cyber criminals carrying out targeted attacks by impersonating well-known and trusted entities, such as Australia Post, Telstra, FedEx, Google and the Australian Government's myGov website," he said.

"This is because these scammers realise that by impersonating brands people deal with daily, there's a good chance people will click the link to find out about a parcel they've apparently ordered, or to find out how much money they supposedly owe."

Real or fake? Email from Australia Post. Photo: Supplied

Last year, an AGL-branded hoax email loaded with ransomware designed to freeze a victim's computer targeted thousands of people.

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission deputy chair Delia Rickard said there had been 136 reports of utility-bill scams so far this year.

"Most scams are trying to do potentially three things," Rickard said. "They are hoping you will pay the energy bill so they get money. They will usually ask you to fill in personal details, so there's a element of identity theft, and they may or may not be downloading malware onto your computer."

"People can lose a lot of money because the average utility bill these days are quite high. Particularly if you take a winter quarter, it can be in the thousands."

According to scam statistics from ACCC, there were 14,634 reports of false billing in 2016, with Australians losing \$659,835.

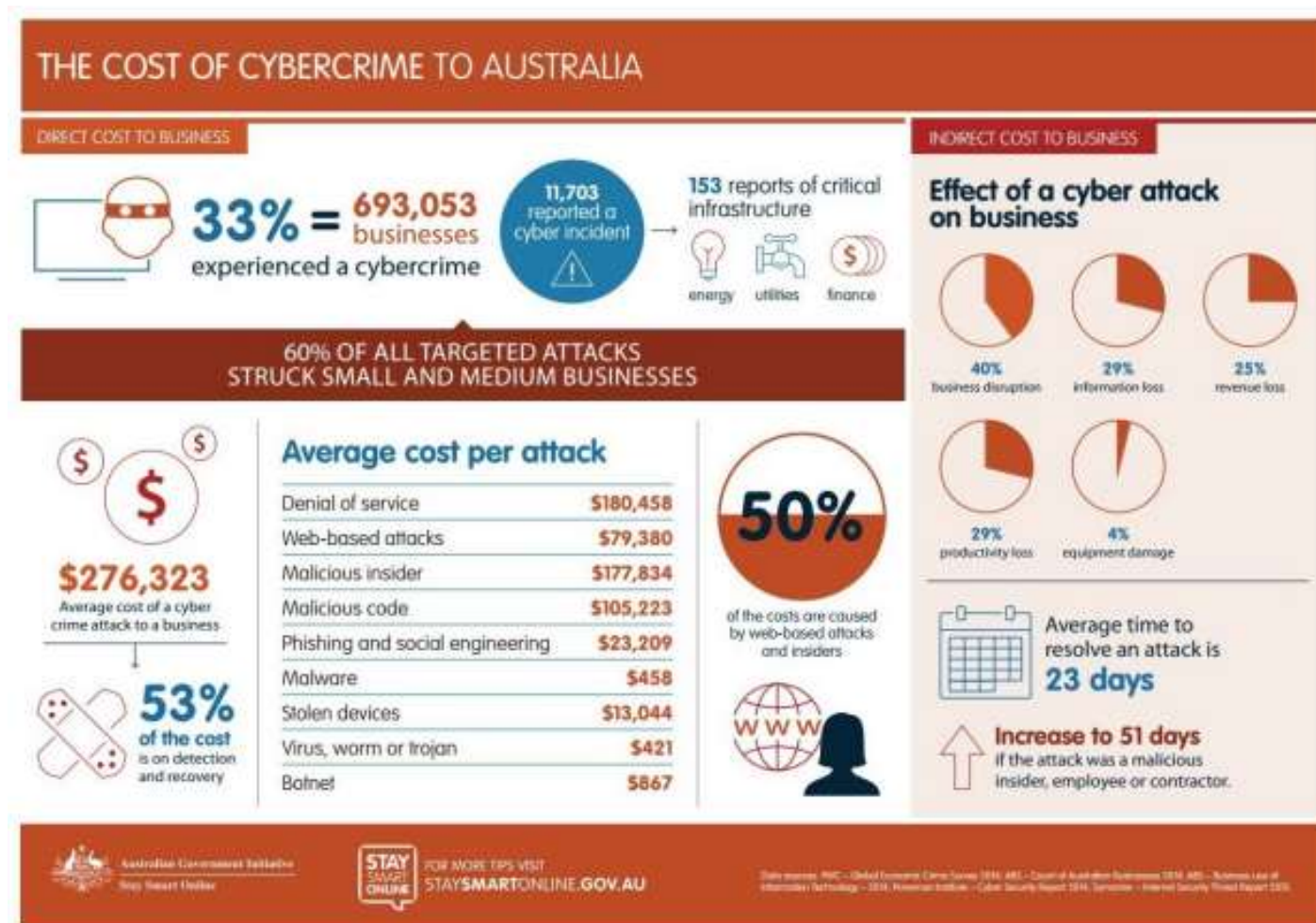
Email was the most successful hoax method, with victims aged 25 to 34 losing the most of money.

Real or fake? Email from energy provider AGL. Photo: Supplied

Mr McDonald said victims' log-in details, passwords and credit card details were valuable to scammers who on-sold them.

Rickard said scam emails today were "quite slick and professional looking", making it harder for victims to identify a hoax.

"The vast majority are high income, low volume scams. They go out really broadly through email or call centres and hide behind trusted names like financial and government institutions or trusted institutions such as Origin or AGL."



The cost of cybercrime in Australia.

Origin spokesman Ryan Auger said the scams were "becoming more sophisticated" and harder to police.

"We're doing what we can to inform our customers and communities about how to spot fake bills, and what to do if they've received one," he said.

"We're asking customers to consider when they last paid their account and to look closely at the sender, contact details and any links contained in the email."

"If these don't seem right, customers should not click any links, and instead delete the email and report it to the ACCC's Scamwatch service."

People are advised to delete any emails from utility providers they are not customers of, without opening any links.

Companies are not able to control the illegal use of their official logos.

Cybercrime is estimated to cost the Australian economy between \$1 billion to \$17 billion each year, with small and medium businesses also targets for scammers.