pro seniors
Advocacy. Empowerment. Justice.

Utility Termination & Payment Assistance

When May My Utilities Be Disconnected?

Utilities may be disconnected if:

1) your bill is not paid;
2) you use the utilities in a way not allowed by the utility company or in a way that might cause harm to other customers' service;
3) you steal equipment from the gas or utility company;
4) there is a government order, dangerous condition or a need for repair requires shut off, or
5) you move or ask the company to disconnect the utilities.

Note that this and all other information in this pamphlet applies only to customers of utilities regulated by the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) and does not necessarily apply to rural cooperatives.

Are There Exceptions To Utility Shut-Offs For Nonpayment?

Yes. Shut-offs are prohibited:

1) for customers current on their Percentage of Income Payment Plan Plus (PIPP Plus) payments (see below)
2) for 30 days, if it would be dangerous to health as certified by a physician (3 such 30-day periods are allowed per 12-month period) (see below) and
3) if it would make operation of necessary medical or life-supporting equipment impossible or impractical
4) between November 15th and April 15th, unless the company, at the time it sends or delivers the notices of termination, informs the occupant where to obtain state and federal aid for payment of utility bills and for home weatherization and information on local government aid for payment of utility bills and for home weatherization
5) if the resident is deployed on active duty and
6) if the customer agrees to make payments in an extended payment plan.

What Are My Legal Rights Concerning Utility Shut-Offs

If your utilities are to be disconnected because of nonpayment, it must happen during normal business hours, it cannot occur after 12:30 p.m. on any day preceding a day on which all services necessary for the customer to arrange and the company to perform reconnection are not regularly performed.

You also have a right to receive notice at least 14 days before a shut-off date. The notice must state:

1) the account number
2) the amount due;
3) the earliest shut-off date;
4) the different methods of payment available
5) the reason(s) for shut off;
6) the name, address and telephone number of a person at the utility company to talk to about the shut-off;
7) about your right to an appeal the reason for termination to the Public Utility Commission of Ohio;
8) that a medical certification program and forms are available from the company; and
9) that non-payment may result in a security deposit and charge for reconnection.

You have no right to notice of shut-off for reasons other than nonpayment, except when the shut-off is for scheduled repairs and will last more than 4 hours.

Who Can Help Me With a Utility Dispute?

The Ohio Consumers' Counsel acts as a residential utility advocate. Call them toll-free at 877-742-5622. PUCO'S Public Interest Center also helps resolve disputes between consumers and regulated utility companies. Call them at 1-800-686-7826.

What Can I Do To Avoid Shut-Off For Non-Payment?

1) Having your doctor sign a Medical Certificate from your utility company certifying that termination of service would be dangerous to your health will allow utility service to continue for 30 days even without any payment. Medical Certificates are available three times in any 12-month period.
2) Applying for the Winter or Summer Crisis program through the Ohio Development Services Agency.
3) If you or your deceased spouse is a veteran, contact your local county Veterans Service Commission for help in paying your utility bill.
4) If you have children in your household, the Department of Job and Family Services may pay a portion of your utility bill through its Emergency Assistance Program.
5) Check for local programs, such as the Salvation Army's HeatShare program that run during the winter months. Contact your local Salvation Army for details.
6) You may also contact your utility company and make arrangements to pay your bill in full or ask about an extended payment plan.

What Extended Payment Plans Are Available?

After you prove that you cannot pay in full, the utility company must offer:

1) a plan in which the amount past due is paid in six or more monthly payments, while you also pay your current bill, or
2) a plan in which you pay 1/3 of the total bill each month (arrearages plus current bill).

If you cannot afford a payment plan and your income is no more than 150% of the poverty level, you may qualify for the Percentage of Income Payment Plan Plus (PIPP Plus).

If Shut-Off Is Unavoidable, What Are My Rights?

The company may not shut-off after 12:30 p.m. on any day before a day that the company will not be able to reconnect you (such as a Sunday or holiday). The company must give you notice personally or attach a notice to your residence on the day of shut-off. The person who comes out to do the shut-off must also first give you a chance to pay the amount you owe.

What Are My Rights As A Tenant If My Landlord Is Responsible For Paying Utilities And Has Received Notice Of Shut-Off?

If your landlord does not pay the overdue bill after receiving a 14-day notice, each apartment will be given an additional 10-day notice of the upcoming shut-off. In addition, a written notice must be displayed in a multi-unit building where everyone will see it.

If you live in a master-metered building (with only one meter for the entire building), you may avoid having your utilities shut off if you:

1) give the utility company a copy of the written disconnection notice that is signed by at least 50% of the tenants in the building;
2) inform the utility company in writing of the date of the last day on which you can pay rent before your landlord penalizes you or claims that you defaulted on the lease; and
3) deposit your current and future rent payments with the clerk of the municipal/county court and apply to the court for an order to use the rent to pay back the utility company. You can get the necessary forms by asking any utility company.

What If I Don't Have Enough Money To Pay My Utility Bills?

There are several energy benefit programs available to low-income customers. Income eligibility for most programs is based at 150% to 200% of the federal poverty level annual income. All energy assistance programs are administered by the Ohio Department of Development. To apply call 1-800-282-0880, or for TDD call 1-800-686-1557.

Customers can contact their utility company or community action agency for an Energy Assistance Programs application. To locate a local community action agency or to be mailed an application, contact the Ohio Consumers' Counsel at 1-877-742-5622. Visit OCC's website for more information.

Pro Seniors helps older Ohioans solve legal and long-term care problems and fight Medicare fraud. Our Legal Helpline provides free legal information and advice for Ohio residents aged 60 and older.

This fact sheet provides general information, not legal advice. The law is complex and changes frequently. Before you apply this information to a particular situation, call Pro Seniors' free Legal Helpline or consult an attorney in elder law.

©2024 Pro Seniors, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
PRO SENIORS® is a registered trademark of Pro Seniors, Inc
Form #LFS050d

800-488-6070 | www.proseniors.org