



Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

Your Residential Utility Consumer Advocate

CONSUMERS' FACT SHEET

Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

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YOUR GUIDE TO ENERGY DISCONNECTION & RECONNECTION



You are not alone if you struggle to pay electric and natural gas bills. The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC), the residential utility consumer advocate, provides this fact sheet to inform consumers about their important rights and responsibilities involving disconnection issues and payment assistance opportunities.

Disconnection

Disconnection of utility services can occur any time of year, even if elderly people or small children are in the home. Most utilities have their own policies regarding the disconnection of service if the weather is below a certain temperature, but there is no state guideline or statute regarding this issue.

Further, there is not a standard temperature that is used by all utility companies across the state; it may be a different temperature for each company. Consumers are therefore advised to take any official disconnection notice seriously, regardless of the season. There are a number of reasons electric and natural gas utilities are permitted to disconnect service, including:

- ▶ Failure to pay the bill and the utility company has followed proper disconnection notification procedures and other requirements;
- ▶ Relocated from the premises or requested that service be disconnected;
- ▶ Repairs are needed, including scheduled maintenance, or a dangerous condition exists; or
- ▶ Tampering with company equipment or violation of other utility regulations.

However, you cannot be disconnected or denied reconnection based on the past due bills of a former customer who no longer resides in the home.

Medical certification waiver

When disconnection of utility service would be a special danger for health reasons to you or someone in your home, certification by a medical professional to keep services connected can be provided up to three times in any 12-month period. Certification forms must be completed for each case of disconnection or reconnection, are valid for 30 days each, and are available from the utility company

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or a public health facility. This certification will prevent a shutoff or restore service within 21 days of termination of service in certain circumstances.

Disconnection notice

When facing a disconnection of service, certain requirements must be followed by the utility company to ensure you have an opportunity to work out a payment plan and avoid losing your electric or natural gas service.

- ▶ You have at least 14 days to pay each month's bill. If payment is not received by the time the next bill is generated, the company may begin the disconnection process.
- ▶ The company must provide you with a notice at least 14 days before disconnection. This notice can either appear as a message on your bill or be sent separately.
- ▶ The electric or natural gas company must attempt to contact you before disconnection. The representative from the company may be able to accept payment at that time. If you are not home, a written notice must be left in a visible location prior to disconnecting service.
- ▶ Disconnection can only be made during normal business hours.

- ▶ During the winter heating season (Nov. 1 - April 15), the company must make contact either with the customer or other adult at the premise at least 10 days prior to disconnection. Contact can be in person, over the telephone or a hand-delivered written notice. This provides additional time for the consumer to work out a payment plan.

Payment plans

Utilities are encouraged to work out an extended payment plan with you. If you face disconnection and cannot work out an individualized payment plan, electric and natural gas companies must make available the following payment arrangements:

- ▶ Either a **“one-ninth”**, **“one-sixth”**, or **“one-third”** plan;
 - The one-ninth plan allows customers to make nine equal monthly payments on the past due amount and places them on a budget plan. The budget plan is based on a nine- or 12-month calculation and may be adjusted as needed during the nine-month period.
 - The one-sixth plan allows you to pay over six months. Therefore,

Utility Company Contact Information

American Electric Power
1-800-672-2231

Cleveland Electric Illuminating
1-800-589-3101

Columbia Gas of Ohio
1-800-344-4077

Dayton Power & Light
1-800-433-8500

Dominion East Ohio Gas
1-800-362-7557

Duke Energy Ohio
1-800-544-6900

Ohio Development Services Agency
1-800-282-0880

Ohio Edison
1-800-633-4766

Toledo Edison
1-800-447-3333

Vectren Energy Delivery of Ohio
1-800-227-1376



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six equal installments of the past due charges plus the total amount of current charges.

- The one-third plan allows you to pay one-third (approximately 33 percent) of the total balance due each month (past due amount plus current charges). All companies are required to offer the one-third plan during the winter heating season (Nov. 1 – April 15).
- ▶ **The Percentage of Income Payment Plan Plus (PIPP Plus)** - Allows income-eligible customers to pay a percentage of their income toward their monthly energy bill year-round. Households with an income at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty guidelines are eligible.
- ▶ **HEAP (Home Energy Assistance Plan)** – Provides a one-time payment toward winter heating bills for consumers who have a household income at or below 175 percent of the federal poverty guidelines;
- ▶ **Winter Crisis Program** – Also known as E-HEAP or Emergency HEAP, this provision of the Home Energy Assistance Program provides consumers with up to \$175 if they have been disconnected or face disconnection in order to have their service restored or maintained. The Winter Crisis Program follows the same income guidelines as the regular HEAP program;
- ▶ **Summer Crisis Program** – Depending on the availability of funds, the state may sponsor a summer crisis program to provide assistance to some low-income consumers.

Assistance programs

Contact your utility company to determine the availability of assistance from any fuel funds. A fuel fund is a program that raises private and/or corporate dollars to help low-income households meet their energy needs.

In addition to electric and natural gas company programs, state assistance also may be available **based on your income**. Examples include:

Reconnection

If you notify the company and pay the amount due and any additional reconnection charges, service must be restored by the end of the next business day. You can request same-day

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The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC), the residential utility consumer advocate, represents the interests of 4.5 million households in proceedings before state and federal regulators and in the courts.

The state agency also educates consumers about electric, natural gas, telephone and water issues.

For more information, please visit the OCC website at www.occ.ohio.gov.



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reconnection if your payment is made and the utility is notified by 12:30 p.m. Same-day reconnections also may require that you agree to pay any additional charges for any work that must be performed after business hours.

If your service has been disconnected for more than 10 business days, the utility may treat you as a new customer and:

- ▶ Reconnect your service within five days (natural gas utility);
- ▶ Reconnect your service within three days (electric utility).

In this instance, reconnection fees would apply.

If you choose to make your payment at an authorized location, you must call in a specific receipt number to the utility for same- or next-day reconnection. A list of authorized locations can be obtained through your utility.

Reconnection charges

Each company may charge a fee for reconnection. Generally, this fee is between \$15 and \$52. You also may be required to pay a deposit. This deposit cannot exceed one month's estimated charges plus 30 percent.

- ▶ **Winter Reconnection Order**
Allows consumers who have been disconnected or are facing disconnection to have service

restored or continue to receive service by paying \$175 and a reconnection fee of no more than \$36. This can be used once per heating season, typically between mid-October and mid-April.

Consumers who use this option may use E-HEAP funds to cover the \$175 payment and also must sign up for HEAP and enroll in a payment plan. Some restrictions apply for PIPP Plus customers.

More information

The Home Weatherization Assistance Program (HWAP) provides you with inspections and repairs to help save energy and money.

For more information about HWAP, PIPP Plus or to learn more about HEAP, customers can visit our website at www.occ.ohio.gov for a free copy of our current HWAP, PIPP Plus, and HEAP fact sheets.

You are also encouraged to contact the Ohio Development Services Agency at 1-800-282-0880 or visit their website at www.development.ohio.gov.

Information about local assistance programs may be available by contacting your local community action agency. To find the community action agency in your area, search by county at www.oacaa.org.