



## 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 TELEPHONE DISCONNECTION & RECONNECTION



If you receive a disconnection notice, you should contact your local telephone company to make payment arrangements. Many local telephone companies have assistance programs that discount basic telephone service for those who qualify. The Office of the Ohio Consumer's Counsel (OCC) provides this information to help you avoid disconnection or to be reconnected to your telephone service.

### Disconnection of bundled service

If you have a bundle of services (i.e., basic local service plus several features, or basic service plus one or more other services, such as Internet or TV), your rights and obligations regarding disconnection of service are spelled out in the contract with your service provider. You should keep a copy of the contract handy and read it carefully.

### Requirements for disconnection of basic service

If you have basic service, which is plain telephone service with no additional features or bundled services, then your telephone company must follow

specific rules before your service can be disconnected for nonpayment. Your telephone company may disconnect your basic service for nonpayment of any past due amount on your bill. But your service cannot be disconnected sooner than 14 days after the due date on your bill.

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***"Your company must send you a notice at least seven days before your basic telephone service is disconnected."***

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Your company must send you a notice at least seven days before your basic telephone service is disconnected. Keep in mind, this notice may be sent separately from your bill. But if the notice is included with your bill, the bill must be postmarked at least seven days before the disconnection date and the disconnection language must be clearly highlighted so that it stands apart from the regular bill language.

The disconnection notice must identify the total dollar amount that must be paid to maintain basic service, give the earliest

# KNOW YOUR RIGHTS TELEPHONE DISCONNECTION & RECONNECTION

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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](http://www.occ.ohio.gov).



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date disconnection may occur (which cannot be earlier than 14 days after the account is past due), and provide contact information for the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio and (for residential customers) the OCC.

### How to get basic service reconnected

In Ohio, a telephone company that disconnects a customer's basic local service for nonpayment must reconnect the customer's basic service as long as the customer:

- ▶ Pays all past due charges for which the service was disconnected; or
- ▶ Makes the first payment under a payment arrangement that the customer and the phone company have mutually agreed upon.

Once either of these payments has occurred, the telephone company must reconnect the customer's basic service by the end of the next business day, unless the customer requests a different date or circumstances beyond the company's control prevent reconnection.

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### ***"Deposit fees cannot exceed 230 percent of the estimated charges for one month's local service."***

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You may be responsible for deposit and reconnection charges. Deposit fees cannot exceed 230 percent of the estimated charges for one month's local service. The local telephone company cannot force you to pay any charges that were not on the disconnection notice for you to be reconnected.

### **"Warm line" service**

Whether you have basic service or a bundle, your local telephone company must allow you to have access to emergency services for at least 14 days past the date your residential service is disconnected for non-payment. This will allow you to call 9-1-1 or an operator where 9-1-1 access is not available. You will not be allowed to make calls to non-emergency services (e.g., family members, a hospital, or doctor), nor will you be allowed to receive calls.

### **About "prepaid" local telephone services**

Some companies may offer you telephone service at significantly higher prices than those of local telephone companies. Often, these prepaid companies target customers who have no credit, bad credit, or have been disconnected by a local telephone company for nonpayment. Monthly charges as much as \$29.99 to \$59.99 for basic service are common. Features such as caller ID and call waiting also may be priced higher.

Before enrolling with a prepaid service, you should learn as much as possible about the terms and conditions they offer. Read service applications and promotional materials carefully and ask about payment schedules, acceptable payment methods and disconnection policies. Pay particular attention to your first month's charges.

Remember you may be able to return to your traditional telephone company and receive assistance. For example, low-income customers may be eligible for a company's Lifeline program, which could include significantly lower monthly local calling charges.

