



Responsible Utility Customer Protection Act

The General Assembly passed and the Governor signed Senate Bill 677, which became Act 201 of 2004, known as the "Responsible Utility Customer Protection Act," now Chapter 14 of the Public Utility Code. The law changed rules that apply to cash deposits; reconnection of service; termination of service; payment arrangements; and the filing of termination complaints by consumers for electric, gas and water. Under the law, a customer can only establish one payment arrangement with the PUC. The utility company has the discretion to offer more than one payment arrangement. The Public Utility Commission will continue to work with all parties to ensure compliance with the law, as well as protect the health and safety of Pennsylvanians. The Act is intended to protect responsible bill-paying customers from rate increases attributable to the uncollectible accounts of customers that can afford to pay their bills, but choose not to pay.

This fact sheet is designed to provide you with very important information regarding how the new Act affects you and your water service.

Your water company can **SHUT OFF** your service if you **FAIL** to do the following:

- ✓ **PAY YOUR BILL**
- ✓ **FOLLOW THROUGH ON PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS**
- ✓ **PAY A DEPOSIT, IF REQUIRED**
- ✓ **ALLOW THE COMPANY ACCESS TO ITS EQUIPMENT**

Before your service is shut off, your water company will take the following steps:

- Send you a 10-Day Notice. Once you get the notice, the utility company has up to 60 days to shut off your service.
- Attempt to contact you three days prior to your shut-off date.
- During winter months (December 1 through March 31), if the utility company cannot reach you at the time of termination, they will leave a 48-hour notice at your residence.

Winter Termination

Water service that is not used in the heating of a household can be terminated during the winter months (December 1 through March 31). All income levels are subject to winter termination unless the water is used in heating. Heat-related water service cannot be terminated without PUC approval.

The water company can **SHUT OFF YOUR SERVICE WITHOUT GIVING YOU NOTICE** for the following reasons:

- ✓ **STEALING WATER SERVICE**
- ✓ **GETTING SERVICE THROUGH FRAUD**
- ✓ **TAMPERING WITH YOUR METER**
- ✓ **UNSAFE SERVICE CONDITIONS**
- ✓ **GIVING THEM A BAD CHECK TO STOP TERMINATION**

Your water service can be shut off any weekday, including Friday, as long as the utility company accepts payment on Saturday.

If your water service is shut off, the utility company will leave a notice telling you what you need to do to get your service restored.

Medical Certification

Your water service will not be shut off if you or someone living in your home is certified as seriously ill by a licensed physician or nurse practitioner. The utility company will require you to provide a letter from a licensed physician or nurse practitioner, stating that shutting off your water service will harm the ill person in the home.



The initial medical certification can be up to 30 days, with renewals possible.

You are still responsible to pay your bill even if there is a medical certificate for someone in your home.

If your service is shut off in the winter (December 1 through March 31), your water service will be restored within 24 hours **after you pay the bill and meet any other conditions of the water company.** Your service will be restored within three to seven days **after you pay the bill and meet any other conditions of the water company** during the remaining months.

If your service is shut off, any adult who lived at the residence will be responsible to pay all or part of the overdue bill if that adult wants service restored in their name. Adult occupants include those over 18 years of age who lived with you during the time the outstanding balance accrued. If the water company determines that an adult lived at the property by checking names on your mortgage, deed, lease or information from a credit reporting service, that adult will be responsible to pay all or part of the overdue bill. **Payment to restore your service will depend on your household income and payment history.**

In order to obtain new service or to reconnect service:

- You may be required to pay a deposit and a reconnect fee.
- If you have broken two or more prior payment arrangements, the utility company can require you to pay the full balance of your bill.
- Your water company may require you to provide proof of income.

The water company can require you to pay a deposit if:

- You do not have good credit or if you do have good credit, but have a bad payment history with the utility company.
- You are shut off for an overdue bill.
- If you miss or pay your bill late for two consecutive payments or three times in a 12-month period, you may have to pay a deposit.



The amount of your deposit may be equal to two average monthly bills.

UNDER THE LAW, A CUSTOMER CAN ONLY ESTABLISH ONE PAYMENT ARRANGEMENT WITH THE PUC. THE UTILITY COMPANY, HOWEVER, DOES HAVE THE DISCRETION TO OFFER MORE THAN ONE PAYMENT ARRANGEMENT TO THE CUSTOMER.

- You must **first contact your water company** to file a complaint or request payment arrangements. You have the right to decline the company's payment arrangement. While the PUC previously could use discretion in setting the terms of payment arrangements, under the Act, the PUC is provided with set payback periods based upon income level.
- If you break a payment arrangement you made with the company, the PUC may establish a payment arrangement using the pre-set payback amounts based upon income levels outlined in the Act. If you break a PUC payment arrangement, the PUC cannot help you unless your income level changed or you have a significant change in circumstances, such as:
 - Onset of chronic or acute illness that results in a significant loss of income.
 - Catastrophic damage to residence that resulted in significant cost to customer.
 - Loss of customer's residence.
 - Increase in the customer's number of dependents in the household.
- The water company will work with you and explain programs that may help you depending on your income or hardship situation.
- If the outstanding balance that you owe includes unpaid charges from participation in a Customer Assistance Program (CAP), the law does not allow the PUC to establish a payment arrangement on your behalf. For those eligible to participate in a CAP, the CAP payment is usually the lowest monthly payment a utility company or the PUC can arrange for you. Your water company determines your CAP payment by your household income and size.
- **Third Party Notification** - The third party notification program provides additional protection against utility service shut-off. The program protects individuals who may either be away from their home for an extended time period or those who may not understand the utility company's guidelines. The program allows consumers to choose another person to receive copies of shut-off notices that are sent to them for non-payment of overdue utility bills. That person (family member or close friend) are made aware of situation before shut-off. The third party is not responsible for paying the bill. For more information about Third Party Notification contact your utility company.
- If you have a Protection from Abuse (PFA) order, you may receive special protections. If you need help, please contact your utility.

For further information, contact the Public Utility Commission:

Write
PA Public Utility Commission
Bureau of Consumer Services
P.O. Box 3265
Harrisburg, PA 17105-3265

Visit our Web site
www.puc.state.pa.us

Call
1-800-692-7380
For people with speech or hearing loss, dial
7-1-1 (Telecommunications Relay Service)

