

In Idaho, investor-owned utilities providing basic services such as electricity, gas, water and telecommunications services must follow rules that protect consumers. The rules are established and enforced by the Idaho Public Utilities Commission (IPUC). The IPUC is a state agency charged with regulating investor-owned utilities. (City-owned or cooperative utilities are not regulated by the IPUC). The rules say when a utility can and cannot disconnect service to a customer. They also require utilities to inform customers before service is actually shut off, so that payment plans can be attempted and disconnection avoided.

This fact sheet answers common questions about your rights and responsibilities as a customer of a regulated gas, electric, or water utility.

When can a company shut off my service?

Your electric, gas, or water company may begin taking steps to shut off your service if:

- You do not pay your bill by the due date.
- You pay your bill with a dishonored check or make an electronic payment from an account that has insufficient funds.
- You do not pay a required deposit.
- You use a false name or misrepresent yourself to get service.
- You do not pay according to an arrangement you made with the utility.
- You are wasting service through improper equipment or otherwise.
- The customer is a minor not competent to contract (an unemancipated minor).
- You tamper with or prevent access to your meter.

How much notice will I get?

If the utility has grounds to shut off your service, the company must:

- Send you a written notice telling you of its intention to shut off service at least **SEVEN DAYS** before the planned date.
- The utility may send you a final notice at least **THREE DAYS** before the planned date. It must give you a final notice at least **24 HOURS** before it plans to actually shut off service. The utility must attempt to contact you or an adult member of your household before shutting off service.
- The utility must shut off service within **21 DAYS** after the planned date or begin the notification process again.
- No additional notice is required if a payment arrangement made after receiving written notice is not kept, or you pay your bill with a dishonored check or make an electronic payment from an account that has insufficient funds.
- If you receive your bill electronically, you may separately consent, in writing, to receive electronic notifications.

Can I be shut off without notice?

There are times when a utility can shut off service without notifying you first. For example, no advance notice is required if a dangerous condition exists or meter tampering is discovered.

Do I have to pay my bill in winter?

Yes. But if you are having trouble paying the gas or electric bill, you should notify the company and try to make special arrangements. Payment plans are available, including a special Winter Payment Plan.

What if I have children, elderly, or seriously ill people at home?

You are still required to make payments if possible. A special Winter Payment Plan is available if you are unable to pay your bill in full during the winter. But if you are not able to pay AND have children, elderly, or ill people in your home, your gas or electric heat cannot be shut off during the months of December, January, and February. You must let the utility know you cannot pay your bill and how you qualify. The winter disconnection moratorium, however, does not apply to customers who don't apply for service or obtain service dishonestly.

What if I'm seriously ill?

No utility can shut off service if you provide the utility with a certificate from your doctor or a public health official with medical training, stating that a serious illness or a medical emergency exists or could be created for any permanent member of your household if your service is shut off.

This certificate will postpone a shut-off for 30 days. If your service is already shut-off, the utility must turn it back on. Within the 30-day period, you must make arrangements with the utility to pay the bill. The utility may agree to renew a medical certificate for an additional 30 days if you are still unable to pay the bill.

Can I get disconnected at night or on the weekends?

Even if the utility has grounds to shut off service, it may not do so at these times:

- Before 8 a.m. or after 5 p.m. Service may be shut off between 5 p.m. and 9 p.m. Monday through Thursday if the utility is unable to gain access to the customer's meter during normal business hours.
- Friday, Saturday, Sunday or any legal holiday recognized by the State of Idaho (New Year's Day, Martin Luther King Day, President's Day, Memorial Day, July 4th, Labor Day, Columbus Day, Veteran's Day, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day).
- The day before a legal holiday recognized by the State of Idaho.
- Any time the utility's business offices are closed.

What if I can't respond to a shut-off notice myself?

You can have a friend, relative, church, or organization notified whenever you receive a shut-off notice from your gas or electric company. This way, if you are ill or away from home, do not speak English, or are in some situation that has prevented you from responding to a shut-off notice, someone else will be alerted. This program does not obligate the person who receives the notices to pay your bills. Call or write your electric, gas or water company if you wish to sign up for this "Third Party Notification" program.

What do I have to pay to keep my service?

In figuring your payment arrangement, the utility must take into account your ability to pay, the size of your unpaid bill, your payment history, and the reason why you have not been able to pay.

- Many different kinds of payment arrangements are available. One type of arrangement for gas and electric customers is a "level pay" plan. The utility estimates how much you will owe in total for service it provides you over the next 12 months. It adds that amount to the total past due on your bill. It then divides the total amount into 12 monthly payments.
- A **Winter Payment Plan** is available to qualified gas and electric customers. Under this plan, you pay one-half (½) of your level pay amount during the winter. It may begin in November and end in March. If you don't make the agreed payments, it will be cancelled. In the spring, you must make arrangements with the utility to pay off the balance owing on your account.
- If you fail to pay as promised in your arrangement, the utility may be willing to enter into a second agreement, but it is not required to do so.

What if the company and I can't agree?

If you have a dispute with a utility company, you may contact the Idaho Public Utilities Commission at 208.334.0369 or 1.800.432.0369. An IPUC staff member will help you resolve your dispute. You can also visit the IPUC online at www.puc.idaho.com.