



## Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

Your Residential Utility Consumer Advocate

# CONSUMER FACT SHEET

### Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

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# KEEP UTILITIES ON WITH A 30-DAY MEDICAL CERTIFICATE



## Stay Connected

If you have a health condition that would be seriously affected by disconnected utility services, you should communicate with your doctor to assure your health is not at risk. Planning ahead and communicating special needs are key.

Ohio law and Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) rules prevent investor-owned utilities from disconnecting a consumer's electric, natural gas, and water services for nonpayment if a permanent member of the household has a medical condition defined as "especially dangerous" to health and the consumer has a 30-day medical certificate on file with the utility company. 30-day medical certificates can also be used when service disconnection would make operation of needed medical or life support equipment impossible or impractical.

In some cases, electric companies can give preference to prevent disconnection or establish a reconnection of utility service to individuals who rely on life support devices, such as respirators, ventilators or other medical equipment. Since there is no guarantee that these customers will receive power immediately, there should always be a backup plan in place.

## 30-Day Medical Certificates

30-day medical certificates can be used to prevent a utility disconnection up to three times during a 12-month period or to reconnect service if the customer has been disconnected for no more than 21 days. Certificate forms must be completed for each case of disconnection or reconnection. The certificate is valid for 30 days and forms are available upon request from the utility.

The certificate form must be signed by a licensed physician, physician assistant, clinical nurse specialist, certified nurse practitioner, certified nurse-midwife, or a local board of health physician. Generally, the medical professional will fax or mail the completed form to the utility company. The medical certificate form can also be downloaded from the PUCO at <https://puco.ohio.gov/utilities/electricity/resources/30-day-medical-certificate>.

If a 30-day medical certificate is received prior to 3:30 p.m., service will be restored the same day. If it is received after 3:30 p.m., service will be restored at the earliest time possible the following day. If the medical certificate is received after 3:30 p.m. on a day that precedes a non-business day, the utility will make every effort to restore service by the end of the day.

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# 30-DAY MEDICAL CERTIFICATE

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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).



*The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel is an equal opportunity employer and provider of services.*

The responsibility for determining whether a condition warrants a 30-day medical certificate lies exclusively with the medical professional – not the utility. There are no income guidelines associated with the use of a 30-day medical certificate. The certificate can be used for either electric or natural gas utilities or both. Investor-owned water companies also offer 30-day medical certificates. For more details, contact your utility company directly, or the PUCO Consumer Call Center hotline at 1-800-686-7826.

### Payment Plans

30-day medical certificates can postpone a disconnection, but customers are still required to pay for electric, natural gas, and/or water services, even for the period the 30-day medical certificate was in effect. The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel recommends consumers contact the utility company to establish a payment plan for the unpaid account balance, which will become due after the 30-day medical certificate has expired.

Consumers with a medical condition who are experiencing difficulties paying their energy bills have options available to them other than a 30-day medical certificate. For all customers, the PUCO requires utilities to offer extended payment plans. The annual Special Reconnect Order, issued by the PUCO, is also available during certain months. For income eligible consumers, options include the Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP Plus), and the Winter Crisis Program. More information can be found at [www.occ.ohio.gov](http://www.occ.ohio.gov).

Consumers who use a 30-day medical certificate are still responsible for paying any missed payments to remain on PIPP Plus. Also, PIPP Plus customers do not receive incentive credits when using a 30-day medical certificate.

### Additional Information for Customers with Medical Needs During Power Outages

Customers with special medical needs should talk with their doctors to determine if their medical condition should be made known to the utility companies in the event of a disconnection, power outage during a storm, or another disruption of the customer's utility service. Customers classified as medically "at-risk" can be placed on a critical customer list with their utility company. This list is used as part of an emergency management plan to identify addresses where there may be people with special medical needs. Electric utilities maintain these lists and notify customers periodically about options and responsibilities during outages.

In such cases, the electric utilities, being made aware of a customer's confirmed medical needs, can prioritize accordingly as part of the emergency planning effort. Being on the critical customer list does not guarantee uninterrupted service or immediate service restoration in the event of an outage, so one should always have a backup plan in place. In addition to verifying medical status with the utility, those in need should contact any of the available social service assistance organizations or the local office of the American Red Cross for help.

### Contact the Utility

**AES Ohio:** 1-800-433-8500

**American Electric Power:** 1-800-672-2231

**CenterPoint Energy:** 1-800-227-1376

**Columbia Gas of Ohio:** 1-800-344-4077

**Dominion East Ohio:** 1-800-362-7557

**Duke Energy Ohio:** 1-800-544-6900

**Cleveland Electric Illuminating:**  
1-800-589-3101

**Ohio Edison:** 1-800-633-4766

**Toledo Edison:** 1-800-447-3333