



Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

Your Residential Utility Consumer Advocate

CONSUMER FACT SHEET

Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

65 East State Street
Suite 700, Columbus, OH
43215

TWITTER:
@OCC4Consumers

E-MAIL:
occ@occ.ohio.gov

WEBSITE:
www.occ.ohio.gov

YOUR GUIDE TO ENERGY DISCONNECTION & RECONNECTION



There is help if you struggle to pay electric and natural gas bills. The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC), your residential utility consumer advocate, provides this fact sheet to help you to know your disconnection and reconnection rights. If you need more information about financial assistance, it can be found at www.occ.ohio.gov/utilityassistance.

OCC urges consumers who are behind on their utility bill payments to contact their utility company immediately to make payment arrangements.

Utility Disconnections

Disconnection of utility services can occur any time of year. Consumers should take quick action when receiving an official disconnection notice from their utility.

There are various reasons why electric and natural gas utilities can disconnect service, including:

- ▶ The consumer failed to pay the utility's bill and the utility followed all proper disconnection notification procedures and other requirements;

- ▶ The consumer moved from the premises or requested that service be disconnected;
- ▶ Utility repairs are needed and/or a dangerous condition exists; or
- ▶ There is equipment tampering, fraud or violation of other regulations.

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

Your Rights

When utility bills are unpaid, the utility must give you advance notice of an opportunity to arrange a payment plan to prevent disconnection of 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 utility may begin the disconnection process.
- ▶ The utility must provide you notice at least 14 days before disconnection. Notice can either be a message on your utility bill or sent separately.

YOUR GUIDE TO ENERGY DISCONNECTION & RECONNECTION

CONSUMER FACT SHEET



Office of the Ohio
**Consumers'
Counsel**

Your Residential Utility
Consumer Advocate

- ▶ The utility must attempt to personally contact you before disconnection. Its representative may be able to accept payment during that contact but may not be able to accept cash at the residence. If you are not at home and miss the utility's visit, written notice must be posted by the utility in a visible location at the premises prior to disconnecting service. Unfortunately, utilities are not required to make in-person visits prior to disconnection of consumers who have smart meters; instead the utility may contact the smart-meter customer by phone or text message.
- ▶ Disconnection can only occur during normal business hours.
- ▶ Consumers are entitled to a second ten-day notice before any disconnection occurring on and after Nov. 1 until and including April 15. The utility must make contact either with the customer or other adult at the premises at least 10 days prior to disconnection. The utility may contact the consumer in person, over the telephone or by hand-delivered written notice. This process provides additional time for the consumer to arrange a payment plan.
- ▶ **The "One-Third," or Winter Heating Season Plan** must be offered from Nov. 1 through April 15. This plan allows you to pay one-third of the total balance due each month (past due amount plus current charges) during the winter heating season. Then, any past due amounts remaining after April 15 can be recalculated using another plan.
- ▶ **The Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP Plus)** is a year-round, income-based payment plan that allows you to pay a percentage of the household's monthly income instead of a bill based on the actual usage. Households with an income at or below 175 percent of the federal income guidelines are eligible. Contact your local Community Action Agency (CAA) to enroll in PIPP Plus. To locate your local CAA, contact 1-800-282-0880 or www.energyhelp.ohio.gov.

Payment Plans

Utilities are encouraged by the PUCO to arrange extended payment plans. If you face disconnection and cannot arrange an individualized plan, electric and natural gas utilities must offer the following standard payment plans:

- ▶ **The "One-Ninth" Plan** allows you to make nine equal monthly payments on the past-due amount and puts you on a budget plan. The budget 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 the past-due amount over six months. On this plan, you must pay your current bill plus one-sixth of the past due balance.

Protections Against Disconnection 30-Day Medical Certificate

If disconnection of utility service would be especially dangerous for the health of someone living in your home, a medical professional (under certain circumstances) can help prevent shutoff or restore service. 30-day medical certificates can be used up to three times in a 12-month period. Certificate forms are available from the utility or a health facility and must be completed for each use.

30-day medical certifications can also be used if disconnection would make the operation of needed medical or life-support equipment impossible or impractical.

Special Reconnection Order (SRO)

Investor-owned electric and natural gas utility customers can avoid disconnection or can reconnect service by paying \$175 of the total amount owed, plus a reconnection fee of no more than \$36 (if applicable). The SRO can be used (regardless of income) once per heating season per utility, typically between mid-Oct. and mid-April. To use the SRO, contact your utility.

Continued on next page

YOUR GUIDE TO ENERGY DISCONNECTION & RECONNECTION

CONSUMER FACT SHEET

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.



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

Eligible PIPP Plus customers with past due amounts greater than \$175 may be able to use the SRO and have any remaining unpaid balance transferred to their PIPP arrearage.

Winter Crisis Program

Also known as E-HEAP or Emergency HEAP, this program provides financial assistance once per heating season for income-eligible households to restore or maintain heating service. It is available from Nov. 1 to March 31 for households at or below 175 percent of the federal income guidelines.

Summer Crisis Program

Similar to the Winter Program, the Summer Crisis Program may provide assistance for some income-eligible consumers between July 1 and Sept. 30.

Service Reconnection

If you notify your utility and pay the amount due with any additional reconnection charges, service must be restored by the end of the next business day. You can request same-day reconnection if payment is made and the utility is notified by 12:30 p.m. (3:30 p.m. if using a medical certification). If paying at an authorized payment location, you must provide the utility proof of payment for same or next-day reconnection. A list of authorized payment locations can be obtained from your utility. Same-day reconnections may also require additional charges for any work performed after business hours.

If your service has been disconnected for more than ten business days, the utility may charge a reconnection fee and treat you as a new customer by taking up to three days to reconnect service.

Utilities may charge consumers a reconnection fee, which is generally between \$15 and \$60. The utility also may require you to pay a deposit. A deposit cannot exceed one month's estimated charges plus 30 percent.

More information

For more information about specific disconnection protections, or to learn about additional assistance programs, visit our website at www.occ.ohio.gov/utilityassistance.

Information about other local assistance programs may be available by contacting your local CAA or the Ohio Department of Development at 1-800-282-0880 or www.development.ohio.gov.

Consumers can also contact the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) about assistance programs or for help resolving a utility dispute or complaint at 1-800-686-7826 or www.puco.ohio.gov.

Utility Contact Information

AES Ohio

(formerly Dayton Power & Light)
1-800-433-8500
www.aes-ohio.com

American Electric Power

1-800-672-2231
www.aepohio.com

CenterPoint Energy

(formerly Vectren)
1-800-227-1376
www.centerpointenergy.com

Columbia Gas of Ohio

1-800-344-4077
www.columbiagasohio.com

Dominion East Ohio Gas

1-800-362-7557
www.dominionenergy.com

Duke Energy Ohio

1-800-544-6900
www.duke-energy.com

The Illuminating Company

1-800-589-3101
www.firstenergycorp.com

Ohio Edison

1-800-633-4766
www.firstenergycorp.com

Toledo Edison

1-800-447-3333
www.firstenergycorp.com