

# Utility Disconnections

## Know your rights and responsibilities



## Disconnections Allowed

All utility customers are responsible for paying for the utility services used. It is the same for each customer. Customers with the same circumstances are treated equally. Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (PSC) rules provide utilities with a variety of tools to address non-payment. Utility collection options include negotiating a deferred payment agreement with the customer, securing a delinquent account with a deposit or disconnecting the customer's service.

### **A utility may disconnect service for a variety of reasons, including:**

- Failure to pay a delinquent account, deposit request, deferred payment agreement or court-awarded costs or fees incurred by the utility for collection,
- Failure to pay an outstanding, undisputed account balance owed at a previous address or at an address where the customer still resides and there is not a payment arrangement in place,
- Failure to provide utility personnel access to meters or other utility equipment,
- Interfering with proper metering,
- Unauthorized reconnection of utility service, or
- Where an unsafe or dangerous situation exists.

## Disconnections Not Allowed

### **A utility may not disconnect utility service in the following situations:**

- Failure to pay for an outstanding bill from a previous customer, unless the previous customer continues to live there,

- For merchandise or charges for non-utility services, or
- For amounts resulting from under-billing that occurred more than one year prior to the current bill.

**In addition, a utility may not disconnect residential electric, natural gas or water service:**

- For non-payment during the cold-weather season from November 1 to April 15 if electricity, gas or water are a necessary part of the heating system,
- During a heat advisory declared by the National Weather Service,
- When a disconnection would cause a medical emergency or interfere with protective services. The utility can postpone disconnection for up to 21 days, but may require a physician's statement or notice from social services or law enforcement, or
- To knowingly assist a landlord in the removal or eviction of a tenant from a rental property.

## **Steps Required Before Disconnection**

**Step One:** Utilities are required to mail or personally deliver a notice before disconnecting service. The notice must contain the following information:

- Date of notice and date of proposed disconnection,
- Name and address of the customer, and if different, the service address,
- Reason for disconnection,
- Instructions to contact the utility if the bill is in dispute or payment arrangements are needed,
- Information about contacting the PSC if the customer is unable to resolve the dispute or make payment arrangements,
- Information that electric, natural gas or water service will be continued for up to 21 days with documentation of a medical or protective services emergency.

**Step Two:** Utilities are required to make an attempt to personally contact the customer prior to disconnection of service. For electric and water utilities, if the disconnection is not made within 20 days after the first notice date, another notice must be posted no less than 24 hours and no more than 48 hours prior to disconnection. Telecommunications and natural gas utilities must disconnect service within 15 days of the original notice. If the disconnection is not made within this time, telecommunications utilities must provide an additional 5-day written notice and gas utilities must provide an additional 24 to 48 hours notice prior to disconnection.

## **Disconnections for safety and protection**

Electric, natural gas and water utilities may disconnect service **without notice** where a dangerous condition exists. This includes situations where service has been reconnected without the utility's authorization. Water utilities may disconnect service with a written 24-hour notice for nonpayment of a bill covering theft of water.

## **Payment plan options**

PSC rules require utilities to negotiate payment agreements to residential customers who are unable to pay their bill in full. Customers who are unable to reach a payment agreement with the utility may contact the PSC's Consumer Affairs Unit for review of a proposed payment plan.

Prior to disconnection, the utility is not required to offer another payment agreement if a customer has defaulted on a deferred payment agreement and their ability to pay has not significantly changed.

If you have questions or concerns about a utility disconnection, please contact the PSC's Consumer Affairs Unit toll free at 800-225-7729 or in the Madison area at 608-266-2001.

The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin is an independent state agency that oversees more than 1,100 Wisconsin public utilities that provide natural gas, electricity, heat, steam, water and telecommunication services.



### **Public Service Commission of Wisconsin**

P.O. Box 7854  
Madison, WI 53707-7854  
Telephone: 608-266-5481  
Toll free: 888-816-3831  
Consumer affairs: 608-266-2001 / 800-225-7729  
TTY: 608-267-1479 / 800-251-8345  
Fax: 608-266-3957  
Website: <http://psc.wi.gov>