



Energy Disconnection & Reconnection

Many consumers struggle to pay natural gas and electric bills. The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC), the residential utility consumer advocate, provides this fact sheet to inform consumers about important rights involving disconnection issues and payment assistance opportunities.

Reasons for disconnection

Disconnection can occur any time during the year, even if elderly people or small children are in the home. There are a number of reasons natural gas and electric companies are allowed to disconnect service including:

- You have failed to pay your bill and the utility company has followed proper notification procedures and other requirements.
- You have moved from the premises or requested that service be disconnected.
- For repairs, including scheduled maintenance or if a dangerous condition exists.
- You have tampered with company equipment or violated other utility regulations.

You **cannot** be disconnected or denied reconnection based on the past due bills of a person who no longer resides in your home.

Medical certification

If you or someone in your home has a medical condition where disconnection would be a special danger for health reasons, certification by a medical professional can be provided up to three times during a 12-month period. Certification forms must be completed for each case of disconnection or reconnection, are valid for 30 days and are available from the utility company or a public health facility. This certification will prevent a shutoff or restore service within 21 days of termination of service in certain circumstances



Disconnection for nonpayment

Certain requirements must be followed by the utility company to ensure you have an opportunity to work out a payment plan and avoid losing your electric or natural gas service.

- You have the right to pay each month's bill within 14 to 21 days. This time period varies from company to company. If payment is not received within 30 days of the due date, the company may begin the disconnection process.
- The company must provide you with a notice at least 14 days before disconnection. This notice may either appear as a message on a bill or be sent separately.
- The electric or natural gas company must attempt to contact you before disconnection. The representative from the company may be able to accept payment at that time. If you are not home, a written notice is left in a visible location prior to disconnecting service.
- Disconnection can only be made during normal business hours.
- During the winter heating season (Nov. 1 - April 15), the company must make contact either with the customer or other adult at the premise at least 10 days prior to disconnection. Contact can be in person, over the telephone or a hand-delivered written notice. This provides additional time to work out a payment plan.

Payment plans

Utilities are encouraged to work out an extended payment plan with you. If you face disconnection and cannot work out an individualized payment plan, electric and natural gas companies must make available the following assistance programs:

- Either a **"one-sixth"** or **"one-third"** plan.
 - The "one-sixth" plan allows you to pay each month for the next six months, one-sixth

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(approximately 17 percent) of past due charges plus the total amount of current charges.

- The “one-third” plan allows you to pay on an ongoing basis, one-third (approximately 33 percent) of the total balance due each month (past due amount plus current charges). All companies are required to offer the one-third plan during the winter heating season (November 1 – April 15).

- The **Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP)**, if you are income-eligible, which is based on a payment that is a percentage of your total monthly income. Households with an income of at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty guidelines are eligible.

State assistance programs

In addition to electric and natural gas company programs, state assistance also may be available **based on your income**. Examples include:

- **HEAP (Home Energy Assistance Plan)**
– Provides a one-time payment toward winter heating bills for consumers who have a household income at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.
- **E-HEAP (Emergency Home Energy Assistance Program)** – Provides you with up to \$175 if you have been disconnected or face disconnection to have service restored or maintained. This is available to households that have an income at or below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.
- **Winter Reconnection Program** – Allows consumers who have been disconnected or are facing disconnection to have service restored or continue to receive service by paying \$175 and a reconnection fee of no more than \$36. This can be used once per heating season, typically between mid-October and mid-April. Consumers who use this option may use E-HEAP funds to cover the \$175 payment and also must sign up for HEAP and enroll in a payment plan.

• Energy Efficiency and Weatherization

Programs – Provides you with inspections and repairs to help save energy and money.

For more information on these utility assistance programs, contact the OCC at 1-877-PICKOCC (1-877-742-5622) toll free or visit www.pickocc.org. You also may call the Department of Development at 1-800-282-0880, or visit its Web site at www.odod.state.oh.us.

Information also is available by contacting your local community action agency.

Reconnection charges

Each company may charge a fee for reconnection. Generally, this fee is between \$15 and \$50. You also may be required to pay a deposit. This deposit cannot exceed one month’s estimated charges plus 30 percent.

Reconnection

If you notify the company and pay the amount due and any additional reconnection charges, service must be restored by the end of the next business day. You can request same-day reconnection if your payment is made and the company is notified by 12:30 p.m. and you agree to pay any additional charges for any work that must be performed after business hours.

If you choose to make your payment at an authorized location, you must call in a specific “receipt number” to the utility for same- or next-day reconnection. A list of authorized locations can be obtained through your utility.

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

For additional information from the Office of the Ohio Consumers’ Counsel:

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