



Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

Your Residential Utility Consumer Advocate

CONSUMERS' FACT SHEET

Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel
10 West Broad Street
Suite 1800, Columbus, OH
43215-3485

E-MAIL:
occ@occ.state.oh.us

WEBSITE:
www.pickocc.org

YOUR GUIDE TO TELEPHONE DISCONNECTION & RECONNECTION



If you receive a disconnection notice, you should contact your local telephone company to make payment arrangements. Many local telephone companies have assistance programs that discount basic telephone service for those who qualify. The Office of the Ohio Consumer's Counsel (OCC) also is available to assist residential consumers facing disconnection.

If you are being disconnected for non-payment, the disconnect notice must include, among other items, the following:

- ▶ Information regarding what services will be disconnected;
- ▶ Amount needed to pay to avoid disconnection of local service;
- ▶ Earliest date when disconnection can occur (cannot be earlier than 14 days after the account is past due);
- ▶ Address and telephone number of the utility office where payment can be sent; and
- ▶ A statement telling you if an additional reconnection charge applies.

In addition, companies must send a notice at least seven days before your telephone service is disconnected. This notice will be included with your bill and not sent separately.

"Companies must send a notice at least seven days before your telephone service is disconnected."

Most local telephone companies must maintain access to emergency services at least 14 days past the disconnection date for any residential customer who is disconnected for non-payment. This will allow you to call 9-1-1 or an operator where 9-1-1 access is not available. You will not be allowed to make calls to non-emergency services (e.g., family members, a hospital or doctor), nor will you be allowed to receive calls.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS TELEPHONE DISCONNECTION & RECONNECTION

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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.pickocc.org.



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

Your local service cannot be disconnected

- ▶ For failure to pay for service of a former subscriber at the household unless the former subscriber is still a member of your household;
- ▶ For failure to pay for a different class of service (e.g., residential service cannot be disconnected for failure to pay for business service);
- ▶ For failure to pay the amount that you are disputing (you must pay the undisputed portion of the bill and notify the company of the portion in dispute); or
- ▶ After 12:30 p.m., if the company cannot reconnect service the following day.

How to get reconnected

Most telephone companies in Ohio cannot deny reconnection of local service to consumers with previous credit problems, including past due balances for long-distance charges, as long as the customer:

- ▶ Pays for all past due charges for which the service was disconnected; or
- ▶ Agrees to a payment arrangement and makes the first installation payment, if required.

You may be responsible for deposit and reconnection charges. Deposit fees cannot exceed 230 percent of the estimated charges for one month's local service. The local telephone company cannot force you to pay any charges that were not on the disconnection notice for you to be reconnected.

About "prepaid" local telephone services

Some companies may offer you telephone service at significantly higher prices than those of local telephone companies. Often, these prepaid companies target customers who have no credit, bad credit or been disconnected by a local telephone company for nonpayment. Monthly charges from \$29.99 to \$59.99 for basic service are common. Features such as caller ID and call waiting also may be priced higher.

"Deposit fees cannot exceed 230 percent of the estimated charges for one month's local service."

Before enrolling with a prepaid service, you should learn as much as possible about the terms and conditions they offer. Read service applications and promotional materials carefully and ask about payment schedules, acceptable payment methods and disconnection policies. Pay particular attention to your first month's charges.

Remember you may be able to return to your traditional telephone company and receive assistance. For example, low-income customers may be eligible for a company's Lifeline program, which could include significantly lower monthly local calling charges.

