



# Your Utility Service and Renting a Home

*Updated October 2007*

**Q. When renting an apartment, who is responsible for setting up electric, natural gas, telephone and water service and sending in payments?**

A. The rental agreement should explain who is responsible for these utility services. Generally the landlord will establish service if the utility bills are included in the monthly rent. On the other hand, if utilities are not included in the rent, tenants may be responsible for contacting the utility companies directly to establish service and pay their bills. If this is the case, the tenant also may have to pay deposits to the utility companies to have service turned on.

**Q. What is master metering and how does it work?**

A. Master metering is a method where the electric, natural gas or water usage of multiple customers is measured on the same meter. This only occurs when the utility service is in the landlord's name. For example, when an apartment is master metered for electric usage, the landlord would receive one electric bill for all tenants measured through one electric meter. Master metering is generally used where electric, natural gas and/or water costs are included in the rent.

**Q. Does a landlord have to maintain utility service in a vacant apartment between renters?**

A. No, but a landlord may have an agreement with the utility company to have the electric, natural gas and water service placed under his or her name until a new tenant moves in. This will ensure that service is not interrupted. This may be especially important during the winter months to keep water lines from freezing.

**Q. If there is damage to utility related equipment, such as a furnace, heat pump or air conditioner, who is responsible for the repairs?**

A. This depends on the terms and conditions listed in a rental agreement, but regular maintenance and repair is generally a landlord's responsibility.

**Q. Who is responsible for repairs to the utility lines going to the apartment?**

A. The responsibility for maintaining this portion of the line would generally be with the landlord or owner of the property.

**Q. If utility payments are included in the monthly rent, and the tenant has paid the monthly rent, can the utility disconnect service from an apartment if the landlord does not pay the utility?**

A. Unfortunately, yes. The company can disconnect for non-payment if it does not receive the money for the services used. Utility companies will send notices to the customer before disconnection occurs. If a payment is not made at that time, the utility company will follow normal disconnection procedures. Consumers who have questions about their payments or a disconnection notice should contact the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC), the residential utility advocate, toll free at 1-877-PICKOCC (1-877-742-5622) for assistance on setting up arrangements with the utility company.

**Q. What happens if several people live in an apartment but the person whose name is on the utility bill moves out?**

A. One of the people still living in the rental unit must apply for utility service. The utility may require proof that the previous customer no longer lives at the location. The utility can disconnect service to a new customer if the previous customer, who owes money on the bill, continues to live at the address. Additionally, the previous tenant is responsible for closing the account in his or her name and runs the risk of additional charges on the account if the services are not canceled.

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**Q. If a tenant moves out and does not terminate or disconnect his or her telephone service, will the next tenant have problems establishing service?**

A. There could be problems, depending on the specific circumstances. For example, if the tenant who has moved out of the residence chooses to receive service through a company other than the local telephone provider, then the new tenant may not be able to install service until the previous service is disconnected. Consumers who are facing this problem can contact the OCC for assistance.

**Q. What can a consumer do if the service is in the landlord's name, but fails to pay the bills?**

A. Consumers who are faced with a landlord not paying the utility bills although utility service is included in the monthly rent can have their rent check deposited into an escrow account at the local county clerk of courts. Each utility could then be paid the amount due from this account allowing service to stay connected.

**Q. Can a consumer who is renting participate in energy choice or aggregation programs?**

A. If the consumer participates in the Percentage of Income Payment Plan or has their service

master metered, then he or she cannot enroll in energy choice or aggregation programs. All others are eligible to participate in energy choice or aggregation programs. Energy choice and aggregation are two ways that consumers can shop for the lowest rates for their utility service. Contact the OCC to request the "Comparing your energy choices" or "The basics of governmental aggregation" fact sheets.

**Q. Is it necessary to enroll in line insurance programs for electric, natural gas, telephone and water service lines?**

A. No, these plans are optional and may not be in the renter's best interest, especially if they are not responsible for the maintenance of the utility lines. For more information contact the OCC to request "The facts about utility line insurance fact sheet."

**Q. Who can I call for more information?**

A. Consumers can contact the OCC, the residential utility advocate, toll free at 1-877-PICKOCC (1-877-742-5622) or by visiting [www.pickocc.org](http://www.pickocc.org) for more information on their rights as a tenant relating to utility issues.

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 and resolves complaints from individuals. To receive utility information, brochures, schedule a presentation or file a utility complaint, residential consumers may call 1-877-PICKOCC (1-877-742-5622) toll free in Ohio or visit the OCC website at [www.pickocc.org](http://www.pickocc.org).

*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:**

**Call: 1-877-PICKOCC (1-877-742-5622) toll free or (614) 466-8574**  
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