

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES SUMMARY FOR OREGON UTILITY CONSUMERS

If you are applying for service or have service with a utility company in Oregon, you have certain rights and obligations. The following is a summary of those rights and obligations prepared by the Consumer Services Division of the Public Utility Commission. The matters described here apply only to electricity, natural gas, telephone, and water services regulated by the PUC.

The utility company's main obligation is to provide you with reliable services at rates approved by the PUC. Your main obligations are to pay for the services you use, to not damage or tamper with the company's facilities, and to notify the company if you move, if you wish to change your service or if you have a problem.

DEPOSITS: The utility may ask you to pay a deposit. If a deposit is required, you may have the right to pay it in several installments.

THIRD-PARTY NOTICES: You have the option to ask that another person receive your bills and notices if you are unable to receive or understand those bills and notices or you do not understand English.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE: Several programs provide financial help, depending on your circumstances.

- The Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) provides money to qualified customers who need help with winter heating bills. Also, the major energy utility companies have their own financial assistance programs to help their customers, including low-income discounts.
- The Oregon Lifeline program provides a monthly discount on phone or high-speed internet service for qualified low-income customers.

DISCONNECTION NOTICES: Before a utility company can disconnect your service, the company must notify you.

- Electric and gas companies are required to give you a 20-day notice, another notice 5 days before disconnection, and must try to contact you the day the disconnection is scheduled.
- Water companies are required to give you a 15-day notice, another notice 7 days before disconnection, and must try to contact you the day the disconnection is scheduled.
- Telephone companies must provide written notice at least 5 days before service is disconnected.

MEDICAL CERTIFICATES: If you or a member of your family has a serious health problem and your utility service is threatened, you may obtain a medical certificate from your doctor or other medical professional who provides your health care. A medical certificate will prevent immediate disconnection of your service and requires your utility to allow you to set up a payment plan to pay any overdue bill. *(Medical certificates do not apply to water utilities.)*

SEVERE WEATHER MORATORIUMS: Energy utilities are prohibited from disconnecting service for nonpayment of bills when the following conditions apply: Temperature is forecasted to be less than 32 degrees (between November to March), during a local Heat Advisory, or when the Air Quality Index is at or above 100. Moratoriums are in place until 8:00 am the following day. If power was disconnected for nonpayment of bills 72 hours prior to a Severe Weather Moratorium, the company must make its best effort to reconnect the power at the request of the customer. *(Weather moratoriums do not apply to water utilities.)*

PAYMENT PLANS: You may take advantage of one of several special payment options designed to make it easier to pay your utility bills. You may pay your bills on an equal-payment plan, which will spread out your payments over the year. If you are unable to pay your utility bills for a period of time and your utility intends to cut off your service, you may also enter into a special agreement to pay the overdue amount over a period of time.

LATE CHARGES: Customers are responsible for paying their utility bills on time. Under certain circumstances, utilities may add late-payment charges to bills not paid on time.

TELEPHONE SOLICITATION: The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) offers a national "No Call" list for persons who do not want to receive unwanted phone calls from persons or companies trying to sell products and services. After you register with the FTC, your phone number will show up on the registry by the next day. Telemarketers will have up to three months to have your phone number removed. Your phone number will remain in the registry for five years from the date you sign up. More details are available at www.ftc.gov.

RESOLVING DISPUTES: If you have a dispute with your utility company that is not resolved by contacting the company, the PUC's Consumer Services Division is available to help you. You may contact the PUC by calling toll free 1-800-522-2404.

CONSUMER ASSISTANCE ORGANIZATIONS: Listings of consumer assistance organizations that participate in Commission proceedings, including addresses and telephone numbers, may be requested from the Commission's Consumer Services Division at 1-800-522-2404.

If you have questions about any of the matters described in this summary, please contact your local utility company or the PUC Consumer Services Division. If you do not speak English, please try to arrange in advance for an interpreter to help you. While utilities and the PUC are sensitive to special needs of persons who do not speak English, their offices may not have someone available who speaks your primary language.