

PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION
ENERGY UTILITY SERVICE RULES

DEPOSITS

The utility company may ask a residential service applicant to pay a deposit if any of these conditions exist:

- ✓ the applicant cannot establish credit based on prior service, employment, or home ownership;
- ✓ the applicant has received two or more disconnect notices from a utility in the last year, has a past due bill owing to a utility, or has had utility service shut off for nonpayment within the last year;
- ✓ the applicant lives with a former customer of the utility at the same address he/she incurred a still-unpaid bill owing the utility;
- ✓ utility service has been tampered with by the applicant within the past 5 years.

The deposit amount cannot be more than twice the average monthly bill. The utility will pay 6% annual interest on the deposit, and will refund the deposit plus interest when the bills have been paid in a satisfactory manner for 12 consecutive months, or upon termination of service.

An applicant for service may provide the utility with an acceptable guarantor for the account in lieu of a cash deposit.

SHUTOFFS

A utility may terminate service when:

- ✓ a past due bill owed by the customer remains unpaid;
- ✓ the customer has broken a payment agreement;
- ✓ the customer fraudulently obtained service, or tampered with utility service, or violated rules that protect public safety;
- ✓ access to the property has been refused.

Utility service cannot be shut off for non-payment on a day, or a day immediately preceding a day, when the services of the utility are not available to the general public for the purpose of reconnecting terminated service. Shutoffs for non-payment may take place only between 8 a.m. and noon.

The utility must give notice of shutoff for non-payment. Shutoff can be avoided when the customer either pays the past due bill in full or enters into a deferred payment agreement with the company. If the payment agreement is broken, the utility does not have to enter into another agreement.

LANDLORD/TENANT SITUATIONS

The utility must give written notice of a proposed shutoff due to a landlord's non-payment to residential units likely occupied by tenants. This notice must be provided at least 15 days before the shutoff date. Tenants may want to obtain legal advice regarding their rights.

SPECIAL WINTER RULES

From November 1 to April 1, a regulated utility may not shut off gas, underground propane, or electric residential service for non-payment without prior Commission approval. The Commission does not approve non-payment winter shutoffs if the customer is unable to pay (customer is a recipient of a public assistance program or has income at or below federal poverty guidelines) or if a member of the customer's household is either at least 62 years old or handicapped. It is the customer's responsibility to inform the utility if one or more of these circumstances exist in the household.

Often, a low-income customer will rely totally on energy assistance programs to pay his or her winter utility bill, only to discover in April that a large balance owing the utility has built up, and the company is demanding payment. The customer who makes the effort to pay something toward his or her utility bill during the winter, on top of what the energy assistance program pays, will not only have a smaller balance due in the spring, but will be in better standing with the company when it comes time to make a deferred payment agreement.

SPECIAL MEDICAL EXCEPTION RULES

Special handling is required on accounts where a licensed health care professional has certified to the utility that absence of service will aggravate an existing medical condition which would threaten the health of any permanent resident.

UTILITY SERVICE CONSUMER ASSISTANCE

The Commission expects regulated utilities to satisfactorily resolve their customers' concerns. Customers not satisfied with the company's response may contact the Commission.

Montana Public Service Commission
1701 Prospect Ave
PO Box 202601
Helena, MT 59620-2601
www.psc.mt.gov
pschelp@mt.gov
Local: 1-406-444-6150

Toll-Free: 1-800-646-6150

WHERE TO GO FOR HELP WITH HEATING BILLS

Bill payment assistance may be available from the Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) and from Energy Share of Montana. Contact information for LIEAP and Energy Share of Montana is provided below:

GLENDIVE—Action For Eastern Montana
377-3564 ☎ 1-800-227-0703

HAVRE—District IV HRDC
265-6743 ☎ 1-800-640-6743

GREAT FALLS—Opportunities Inc.
761-0310 ☎ 1-800-326-0955

LEWISTOWN—District VI HRDC
535-7488 ☎ 1-800-766-3018

BILLINGS—District VII HRDC
247-4778 ☎ 1-800-433-1411

HELENA—Rocky Mtn Devel. Council
447-1625 ☎ 1-800-356-6544

BOZEMAN—District IX HRDC
587-4486 ☎ 1-800-332-2796

KALISPELL—Community Action Partnership of Northwest Montana
758-5433 ☎ 1-800-344-5979

District XI HRDC
☎ Missoula – 728-3710
☎ Hamilton – 363-6101
☎ Superior – 822-4251

BUTTE—District XII Action Inc.
533-6855 ☎ 1-800-382-1325

Call 211 to find out about additional options. 211 call centers provide referrals and information regarding local resources.