

The Cold Weather Rule



The Cold Weather Rule is designed to protect customers, under certain conditions, from being disconnected in the winter months. Qualifying customers are placed on more lenient payment terms to help avoid possible disconnection. Municipally operated systems, cooperatives and those that provide propane delivered by truck are not under PSC jurisdiction. The rule does not apply to them.

FACTS

Prohibits disconnection of heat-related service from November 1 through March 31 when the temperature is forecasted to drop below 32 degrees during the following 24-hour period.

Allows you to budget your payments over 12 months.

You may be able to extend payment of pre-existing arrearages over 12 months.

May not require a deposit if you enter into a payment agreement and the agreement is kept.

Requires that you be notified by mail, with one notification attempt in person, before your service is shut off.

Allows you to register with the utility if you are 65 years of age or older; disabled to the extent that you have filed with the utility a medical form submitted by a medical physician attesting that your household must have natural gas or electric utility service provided in the home to maintain life or health; or if you have obtained a formal award letter issued from the federal government of disability benefits.

Requires you to be notified of possible financial help in paying your bill.

Allows reconnection of your service for less than the full amount owed.

Prohibits disconnection of registered low-income elderly or disabled customers who make a required minimum payment.

Additional provisions for natural gas customers: Allows customers who defaulted on a previous Cold Weather Rule payment agreement to make an initial payment of 50% of his/her outstanding balance or \$500, whichever is less, with the remaining amount deferred to be paid in a Cold Weather Rule payment agreement plan over 12 months.

A gas utility will not be required to offer the more lenient payment terms to keep service on or to reconnect a customer under the new provisions of the rule more than once every two years or when a customer has defaulted on a Cold Weather Rule payment plan under this section three or more times. In those situations, customers would be required to pay 80% of the outstanding balance to keep service or to have service restored.

Q&A

Q: When is the rule in effect?

A: November 1 through March 31.

Q: What is the minimum payment a registered low-income elderly or disabled customer must make?

A: The customer must pay at least 50 percent of:
1) the actual bill for usage during that billing period, or
2) the level bill amount under his/her Cold Weather Rule Payment plan.

Q: Who is considered a registered low-income elderly or disabled customer?

A: A customer who receives an income below 150% of the federal poverty guidelines and is registered with the utility company as an elderly or disabled customer.

Q: Is a customer required to pay the full amount owed to be reconnected if he/she broke a past Cold Weather Rule payment agreement?

A: No. If you are an electric company customer and break your payment agreement, the electric company will require an initial payment of up to 80% of your total balance. If you are a natural gas company customer you may make an initial payment of 50% of your outstanding balance or \$500, whichever is less, with the remaining amount deferred to be paid in a Cold Weather Rule payment agreement plan over 12 months.

IMPORTANT NOTE: The utility may recover unpaid amounts from those winter months by adjusting the customer's Cold Weather Rule payment installments after March 31.

Programs like the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) can assist you in paying heating bills. For more information, contact your local Community Action Agency.