



## Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

Your Residential Utility Consumer Advocate

# CONSUMERS' FACT SHEET

### Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

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# YOUR GUIDE TO ENERGY DISCONNECTION & RECONNECTION



You are not alone if you struggle to pay electric and natural gas bills. The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC), the residential utility consumer advocate, provides this fact sheet to inform consumers about their important rights involving disconnection issues and payment assistance opportunities.

Important changes in the state disconnection and reconnection rules will be made effective November 2010. These changes also affect the credit standards and deposit requirements for residential consumers. Consumers are encouraged to contact the OCC or their community action agency for more specific information.

### Reasons for disconnection

Disconnection of utility services can occur any time during the year, even if elderly people or small children are in the home. There are a number of reasons natural gas and electric companies are permitted to disconnect service, including:

- ▶ You have failed to pay your bill and the utility company has followed proper disconnection notification procedures and other requirements;

- ▶ You have moved from the premises or requested that service be disconnected;
- ▶ Repairs are needed, including scheduled maintenance, or a dangerous condition exists; or
- ▶ You have tampered with company equipment or violated other utility regulations.

However, you cannot be disconnected or denied reconnection based on the past due bills of a person who no longer resides in your home.

### Medical certification

When disconnection of utility service would be a special danger for health reasons to you or someone in your home, certification by a medical professional to keep services connected can be provided up to three times in any 12-month period. Certification forms must be completed for each case of disconnection or reconnection, are valid for 30 days and are available from the utility company or a public health facility. This certification will prevent a shutoff or restore service within 21 days of termination of service in certain circumstances.

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**Disconnection for nonpayment**

When facing a disconnection of service, certain requirements must be followed by the utility company to ensure you have an opportunity to work out a payment plan and avoid losing your electric or natural gas service.

- ▶ You have at least 14 days to pay each month's bill. If payment is not received by the time the next bill is generated, the company may begin the disconnection process.
- ▶ The company must provide you with a notice at least 14 days before disconnection. This notice can either appear as a message on your bill or be sent separately.
- ▶ The electric or natural gas company must attempt to contact you before disconnection. The representative from the company may be able to accept payment at that time. If you are not home, a written notice must be left in a visible location prior to disconnecting service.
- ▶ Disconnection can only be made during normal business hours.
- ▶ During the winter heating season (Nov. 1 - April 15), the company must make contact either with the customer or other adult at the premise at least 10 days prior to disconnection. Contact can be in person, over the telephone or a hand-delivered written notice. This provides additional time for the consumer to work out a payment plan.

**Utility assistance**

Utilities are encouraged to work out an extended payment plan with you. If you face disconnection and cannot work out an individualized payment plan, electric and natural gas companies must make available the following assistance programs:

- ▶ Either a **“one-ninth”**, **“one-sixth”** or **“one-third”** plan;
  - The one-ninth plan allows customers to make nine equal monthly payments on the

arrearages and places them on a budget plan. The budget plan is based on a nine- or 12- month calculation and may be adjusted as needed during the nine-month period.

- The one-sixth plan allows you to pay each month for the next six months, one-sixth (approximately 17 percent) of past due charges plus the total amount of current charges.
- The one-third plan allows you to pay one-third (approximately 33 percent) of the total balance due each month (past due amount plus current charges). All companies are required to offer the one-third plan during the winter heating season (Nov. 1 – April 15).
- ▶ **The Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP Plus)** - Allows income-eligible customers to pay a percentage of their income toward

**2011 - 2012 PIPP Plus  
Income Guidelines**

A household whose total income is less than the following income guidelines may qualify for PIPP assistance.

Size of household	Total household income	
	for 3 months	for 12 months
1	\$4,084	\$16,335
2	\$5,517	\$22,065
3	\$6,949	\$27,795
4	\$8,382	\$33,525
5	\$9,814	\$39,255
6	\$11,247	\$44,985

*\* For households with more than six members, add \$1,432.50 per person for 3 months and \$5,730 per person for 12 months.*



their monthly energy bill year-round. Households with an income at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty guidelines are eligible.

- ▶ **Fuel Fund Assistance** – Contact your utility company or the OCC to determine the availability of assistance from any fuel funds. A fuel fund is a program that raises private and/or corporate dollars to help low-income households meet their energy needs.

### State assistance programs

In addition to electric and natural gas company programs, state assistance also may be available **based on your income**. Examples include:

- ▶ **HEAP (Home Energy Assistance Plan)** – Provides a one-time payment toward winter heating bills for consumers who have a household income at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines;
- ▶ **E-HEAP (Emergency Home Energy Assistance Program)** – Provides you with up to \$175 if you have been disconnected or face disconnection to have service restored or maintained. This is available to households that have an income at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty guidelines;
- ▶ **Winter Reconnection Program** – Allows consumers who have been disconnected or are facing disconnection to have service restored or continue to receive service by paying \$175 and a reconnection fee of no more than

\$36. This can be used once per heating season, typically between mid-October and mid-April. Consumers who use this option may use E-HEAP funds to cover the \$175 payment and also must sign up for HEAP and enroll in a payment plan;

- ▶ **Energy Efficiency and Weatherization Programs** – Provides you with inspections and repairs to help save energy and money; and
- ▶ **Summer Crisis Program** – Depending on the availability of funds, the state may sponsor a summer crisis program to provide assistance to some low-income consumers.

2011 - 2012 HEAP & E-HEAP Income Guidelines	
A household with a total income less than the following guidelines may qualify for HEAP and E-HEAP assistance:	
Size of household	Total household income for 12 months
1.....	\$21,780
2.....	\$29,420
3.....	\$37,060
4.....	\$44,700
5.....	\$52,340
6.....	\$59,980

\* For households with more than six members, add \$7,640 per person

## Ohio utility companies that offer PIPP

### Electric

- ▶ American Electric Power
- ▶ Cleveland Electric Illuminating
- ▶ Dayton Power & Light
- ▶ Duke Energy Ohio
- ▶ Ohio Edison
- ▶ Toledo Edison

### Natural Gas

- ▶ Arlington
- ▶ Brainard
- ▶ Columbia Gas
- ▶ Constitution
- ▶ Dominion East Ohio Gas
- ▶ Duke Energy Ohio
- ▶ Eastern
- ▶ Foraker
- ▶ Gasco
- ▶ KNG
- ▶ Orwell
- ▶ Oxford
- ▶ Piedmont
- ▶ Pike
- ▶ Sheldon
- ▶ Southeast
- ▶ Suburban
- ▶ Swickard
- ▶ Vectren Energy Delivery of Ohio
- ▶ Verona
- ▶ Waterville

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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](http://www.pickocc.org).



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

### Reconnection charges

Each company may charge a fee for reconnection. Generally, this fee is between \$15 and \$52. You also may be required to pay a deposit. This deposit cannot exceed one month's estimated charges plus 30 percent.

### Reconnection

If you notify the company and pay the amount due and any additional reconnection charges, service must be restored by the end of the next business day. You can request same-day reconnection if your payment is made and the utility is notified by 12:30 p.m. Same day reconnections also may require that you agree to pay any additional charges for any work that must be performed after business hours.

If your service has been disconnected for more than 10 business days, the utility may treat you as a new customer and:

- ▶ Reconnect your service within five days (natural gas utility);
- ▶ Reconnect your service within three days (electric utility).

In this instance, reconnection fees would apply.

If you choose to make your payment at an authorized location, you must call in a specific receipt number to the utility for same- or next-day reconnection. A list of authorized locations can be obtained through your utility.

### More information

For more information about PIPP Plus or to learn more about HEAP, customers can visit our website at [www.pickocc.org](http://www.pickocc.org) for a free copy of our current PIPP Plus and HEAP fact sheets.

You are also encouraged to contact the Ohio Department of Development at 1-800-282-0880 or visit its website at [www.odod.state.oh.us](http://www.odod.state.oh.us). Information about local assistance programs also may be available by contacting a local community action agency.

## Additional Contact Information

**American Electric Power**  
1-800-277-2177

**Cleveland Electric Illuminating**  
1-800-589-3101

**Columbia Gas of Ohio**  
1-800-344-4077

**Dominion East Ohio Gas**  
1-800-362-7557

**Dayton Power & Light**  
1-800-433-8500

**Duke Energy Ohio**  
1-800-544-6900

**Ohio Department of Development**  
1-800-282-0880

**Ohio Edison**  
1-800-633-4766

**Toledo Edison**  
1-800-447-3333

**Vectren Energy Delivery of Ohio**  
1-800-227-1376