

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING THE DISCONNECTION OF UTILITY SERVICES**

- Can a utility company cut off my gas or electricity?
- I'm elderly and disabled, can my electricity or gas be shut off?
- I receive public assistance from the state. Can the state stop the electric or gas company from shutting off my gas or electricity?
- The temperature is 15 degrees. Will they still cut off my gas or electricity?
- I just received a notice that my gas or electricity is about to be cut off. What do I do?
- Can I stop the gas or electric company from cutting off my gas or electricity?
- I need help paying my bill. Is there anyone I can turn to?
- How can I get my gas and electricity turned back on after it's been cut off?
- My gas or electric company says I have to pay a deposit to turn on my gas or electricity. Can they do that?

### **Can a utility company disconnect my utility service?**

Yes, a utility company can shut off your electrical or gas service if you have not paid your bill. The electric company and gas company are required by law to give you proper notice prior to cutting off your electricity or gas.

### **I'm elderly and disabled, can my electricity and gas be shut off?**

Maybe not. If you or someone living with you is an elderly person, disabled, or suffering from an illness at the time you receive the notice that your electricity or gas is about to be shut off, you may be able to temporarily postpone the shut off. You must get a letter from a doctor to verify the medical condition and present it to the utility company within five (5) days of receiving the notice that your gas or electricity is about to be shut off.

This will only postpone the shut off for thirty (30) days and can only be used once.

### **I receive public assistance from the state. Can the state stop the electric company from shutting off my gas or electricity?**

If the utility company is aware that you are a welfare recipient, it must notify both you and Health and Human Services that your gas or electricity may be shut off. You should contact your caseworker to determine if you can receive assistance from HHS with your utility bill.

If you are currently under sanction from HHS, you may not be eligible for financial assistance with your gas or electricity bills. This may also prevent you from receiving assistance from community action agencies.

**The temperature today is 15 degrees, will they still cut off my gas or electricity?**

Cutting off your electricity or gas can have serious consequences for you during the severe weather. In some instances, weather conditions can prevent the gas and electric companies from cutting off your gas or electricity. Each company sets their own policy about cutting off gas and electricity during cold weather.

**I just received a notice that my gas or electricity is about to be cut off. What do I do?**

NEVER disregard a disconnect notice. If you receive a notice telling you that your electricity or natural gas is about to be shut off, immediately contact the utility or an advocate to assist you in dealing with the utility company. If you need an advocate, contact the nearest community action agency, the Salvation Army, or your caseworker at the Department of Health and Human Services. They are willing to help.

**Can I stop the gas and electric company from cutting off my gas and electricity?**

In order to stop them from cutting off your gas or electricity, you MUST NOT disregard letters sent to you. Call the gas or electric company or an advocate immediately and ask for help. Many community action agencies will be able to assist you in dealing with the gas and electric companies. They may also be able to refer you to an agency that may have funds available to help you pay your bill.

Gas and electric companies will often try to work out a payment plan with you. The plan must be reasonable. Develop a repayment plan and propose it to the gas or electric company: If the plan is approved, make all the payments required under the payment plan. If the plan is reasonable and you make all payments under the plan, your gas or electricity will not be shut off.

If a customer negotiates in good faith, the gas or electric company will often try to accommodate your needs. If you ignore the letters they send to you about your bill, fail to propose a reasonable payment plan, or miss payments once a plan is approved, the gas or electric company is less likely to be cooperative and the process to cut off your gas or electricity will likely begin again.

### **I need help paying my bill. Is there anyone I can turn to?**

The following agencies may be able to assist you with paying your utility bills. The money they provide is often given to them through grants and donations. Because assistance is limited, agencies often have limitations on how much assistance can be provided and how often they can provide assistance.

- Health and Human Services
- The Salvation Army
- Bureau of Indian Affairs
- United Way, 2-1-1
- Community Action Agencies
- Local Churches

### **How can I get my gas and electricity turned back on after it's been cut off?**

If your gas or electricity has been shut off, contact an advocate or the utility company and try to get it turned back on. You will be responsible for all charges related to reconnecting your service. This may include a deposit or reconnect fee in addition to the amount of the unpaid bill.

If you cannot pay the fees required to turn on your gas or electricity, contact one of the agencies listed above and seek financial assistance from them.

### **My gas or electricity company says I have to pay a deposit to turn on my gas or electricity. Can they do that?**

Most gas or electric companies have a deposit requirement to protect against nonpayment. A gas or electric company usually cannot shut off your service for failure to pay a new or additional deposit. The amount of the deposit must be reasonable and the deposit cannot be collected in a discriminatory manner.

If the gas or electric company is a public utility, you may have the right to collect interest on your deposit.

### **Contact us.**

Please let us know of specific problems you have faced with having your gas and/or electricity shut off.

