

IMPORTANT NEW INFORMATION ON ALTERNATE PAYMENT PLANS FOR RESIDENTIAL UTILITY CUSTOMERS

The Public Service Commission regulates gas and electric companies, including oversight of rules for utility service terminations

On March 11, 2009 the Commission had issued an order with a temporary delay of service terminations for residential utility customers who are behind in their bills

On April 24, 2009, the Commission issued an order with new guidelines regarding alternate payment plans.

An alternate payment plan means a payment plan designed to avoid service termination and to pay all outstanding charges to the utility.

The temporary delay of service terminations is no longer in effect

NEW GUIDELINES

These requirements apply to BGE, PEPCO, Delmarva Power and Light Company, Allegheny Power and Washington Gas Light Company

You may not be terminated by your utility until you have been notified **in writing** that

- Flexible payment plans are available
- You must contact the utility **within 14 days** to negotiate a payment plan
- You have the **right to appeal** to the Public Service Commission, if you and the Company cannot agree on the terms of a payment plan
- If there is a disagreement, the utility cannot terminate your service until it gives you a “best and final offer” in writing – you will have 5 business days to appeal to the Commission
- Your service cannot be terminated while the appeal is pending
- Financial assistance may be available for eligible customers.

These utilities must offer you flexible payment plans based upon your ability to pay and the following factors:

- Size of the outstanding bill;
- Customer payment history;
- Any expected energy assistance (EUSP and MEAP) benefits for which the customer may be eligible;
- The length of time the bill has been outstanding;
- The circumstances which resulted in the past due bill;

- Hardships which may result from lack of utility service;
- Any other relevant factors related to circumstances of the customer.

The new payment plan may be offered for **up to twelve months**.

The time period for payment may be extended past 12 months in critical situations.

The utility cannot charge you interest or late fees as long as you stay current with the plan.

The utility can charge you any late fees that have accrued before the start of the payment plan.

The utility cannot require you to make a down payment as part of the plan IF:

- Your service has not been previously terminated
- You have made payments within the prior 90 days, OR
- You have not previously defaulted on payment plans

Otherwise, the utility MAY request a down payment of UP TO 25% of the amount due

- The utility must take into account your ability to pay and maintain the payment plan, and the need for the down payment.

The utility will offer to enroll you in an even monthly billing (budget billing) plan as part of your alternate payment plan.

- OPC strongly encourages you to consider enrollment in these billing plans

If you fall behind on the payment plan, you will be allowed one opportunity to avoid service termination by bringing the outstanding payments current

Deposit Request: If your service is still on, the utility **cannot** request a new security deposit based on an increase in your electricity or gas usage or in your expected annual bill

UTILITY EXEMPTIONS

The rules do not apply to other gas and electric companies in Maryland

- Examples: SMECO, Choptank, Columbia Gas, municipal utilities

HOWEVER, if you are behind in your bills or have received a termination notice from these companies, you should immediately:

- Contact the utility and request a flexible payment plan based on your circumstances and ability to pay
- If you and the utility cannot agree on a plan, you should file an appeal with the Commission

WHAT TO DO

Your Service is Still ON

If you are behind on your gas or electric bill now or have received a service termination notice, you should:

- contact your utility immediately and request an alternate payment plan
 - You should **not** wait for the turn-off notice.

Apply for energy assistance AND weatherization services

- There is an automatic 55 day hold on service terminations IF you apply for energy assistance and are waiting for a decision on your eligibility

Your Service is OFF

If your service was terminated between January 1, 2009 and April 24, 2009 and is still off, you will be allowed to reconnect your service:

A down payment of up to 25% of the outstanding debt may be required (see above)

The utility must offer you a payment plan for the remainder (see above)

The utility cannot charge you reconnection costs

The utility must give you up to 3 months to pay a new security deposit

STATE AGENCIES WITH ENERGY-RELATED ROLES

- Maryland Public Service Commission (PSC)
 - www.psc.state.md.us
 - 410-767-8028 or 1-800-492-0474

- Maryland Office of People's Counsel (OPC)
 - www.opc.state.md.us
 - 410-767-8150 or 1-800-207-4055

- Maryland Energy Administration (MEA)
 - www.energy.state.md.us

- Maryland Department of Human Resources (including Office of Home Energy Programs)
 - www.dhr.state.md.us
 - 1-800-352-1446

- Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)
 - www.dhcd.state.md.us

- Website referral: Agency resources
 - <http://problemsolver.maryland.gov>