

Problems with your natural gas, electricity, telephone or water service?

# TAKE COMMAND OF YOUR UTILITY RIGHTS

**DC Ratepayers:** Did you know that that you are entitled to safe, adequate, and reliable utility services at rates that are just and reasonable?

# YOU HAVE RIGHTS WHEN IT COMES TO YOUR ELECTRIC, NATURAL GAS, TELEPHONE AND WATER SERVICES



If your service is going to be **SHUT OFF**: You have the right to negotiate a payment plan with the utility.



If you are having **TROUBLE MAKING A PAYMENT**: There are utility assistance programs available to help pay or reduce the amount you owe.



If you have a **SERIOUS MEDICAL CONDITION**: You have the right to keep your service on and get an extension to pay by providing medical certification.



If you do **NOT** have the **UTILITY BILL IN YOUR NAME**: You are **NOT** responsible for anyone else's account, even if you live at the same residence.



If you are having trouble working things out **WITH A UTILITY**: You have the right to get assistance from the Office of the People's Counsel and the Public Service Commission can help.

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## Be prepared to talk to a utility company representative:

- **Write down notes**, including the day and time of the conversation, the name of each person you talk to, their title, and contact information (phone, email, etc.).
- **Follow up with a letter or email**, and be sure to write out everything as you understood it from your conversation. This is your record confirming what was said.
- **Ask for a response** or a copy of any agreement you make in writing.
- **Make and keep copies** of all documents, bills, etc.
- **Continue to follow up** by phone and in writing if you do not hear back from the utility.
- **Contact the Office of the People's Counsel** and, as necessary, the Public Service Commission.

### About Third Party Suppliers (TPS) Companies

TPS companies are registered and authorized by the DC PSC to provide competitive energy services to consumers. These suppliers are permitted to set their rates differently than traditional local utility companies. For example, the TPS company may offer a low introductory rate that can vary over time, or they may offer you service that is sourced from 100% renewable energy. OPC can help you compare offers to determine whether going with a TPS company is a better deal for you.

### Buyer Beware!

The popularity of different service options for utility consumers has also opened the door to SCAM ARTISTS. Sometimes scammers will pretend to be from "Pepco" or "WGL," or say that they are from a company that will give you a better deal. Sometimes they will demand that you immediately pay a bill through them, to avoid disconnection. Consumers must be alert! Some scammers are focused on gathering your personal information and account number to either bill you for services you did not request, switch your service to a company offering high rates, or to make fraudulent charges against your credit. Contact the Office of the People's Counsel for information on the latest scams and how to protect your account from harm.



# IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, YOU HAVE RIGHTS AS A UTILITY CONSUMER





# If You Are Behind on Your Bills:

Contact the utility as soon as your payment is past due, you may incur a late payment charge.

1. Ask whether you can be allowed more time to pay, often the utility can offer you a few days to get your account back on track.
2. If you owe more than you can pay in a short time period, ask if the utility offers a Time Payment Arrangement or Time Payment "Agreement" that will allow you to catch up by paying past due and current bills together over a period of time, such as 30–90 days. Generally a utility will offer a Time Payment Agreement that allows a consumer to catch up on their past due account balance, by paying an agreed upon amount each month. For example, a customer might pay their full current bill plus \$50.00 toward the TPA amount every month until the debt is cleared. Another option is a "level" payment plan where you pay the same amount each month, year-round. Your payments are "true-up" once a year to match payments with your actual usage. Your true-up bill may be higher or lower than your monthly payment. OPC staff can provide you with more information about TPA and level payment plan arrangements.
3. If you think you will continue to have problems making payments on time, ask questions to determine whether you could be eligible to participate in discount programs or to receive income-based assistance with your bill.



# If You Have a Problem with Your Bill, a High Bill, an Estimated Bill or No Bill:

Contact the utility to explain why you think the bill is wrong. Explain why you believe your bill appears to be wrong and share any evidence you have.

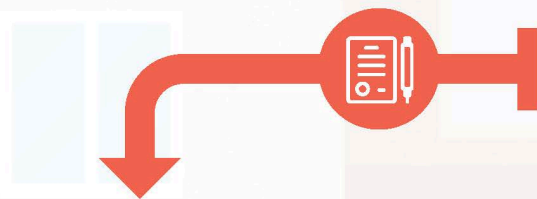
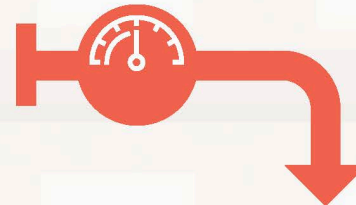
**1. Gather any information you have that supports why the bill appears to be incorrect**, which can

include prior bill statements, calculation errors, excess charges, charges and fees for services you did not request, incorrect account name or account number, or another problem.



**2. State your problem clearly to the utility company representative** and arrange to share copies of your documents by mail, fax, or email.

**3. If the problem is due to metering, you may ask to have a meter reading**, or you may request a “Referee Meter Test” to determine the accuracy of the meter serving your home. OPC staff can assist with your meter reading or test request.



**4. Take notes and follow up with written correspondence** to the utility, OPC or Public Service Commission (PSC) representatives working on your issue.

**5. Continue to make payments on your bill** and honor any agreements you make while your complaint is investigated.



**6. If you are not satisfied with the resolution offered, contact OPC at (202) 727-3071.**





# If You Receive a Disconnection Notice:

Contact the utility immediately to confirm why you have received the notice, such as payments were not made, payment is past due, or payment was not received by the company.

1. If you do not dispute the reason for the shutoff, ask whether your account can be paid over time until you catch up. The utility will usually offer you a Time Payment Arrangement (TPA).
2. If you dispute the reason for the notice, contact OPC or the DC PSC to begin a complaint against the utility.
3. Know the rules regarding Service Disconnection. The DC Consumer Bill of Rights specifies the utility must contact you at least two (2) days before the disconnection date regarding the pending action. Utility service cannot be shut off after 5:00 PM on Thursdays and before 8:00 PM on Mondays. Utility service cannot be shut off on a day before a holiday or when the temperature will be 32°F or below. Restoration is required within 24 hours of payment.



## Persons with Serious Medical Conditions

1. If you or someone in your family requires special medical equipment or could suffer grave health impacts due to loss of utility service, you may qualify for special protections from utility service cutoff.
2. Utility service disconnection can be delayed for at least 21 days if you provide the utility a physician's certificate or notice from your health provider certifying your condition.
3. Pepco's Emergency Medical Equipment Notification Program helps protect consumers that use medical equipment requiring electricity.
4. Make sure your medical certifications are renewed each year.



The Customer Assistance Programs are administered by the DC Department of Energy & Environment (DOEE). The original CAP provides eligible DC Water customers with a discount on the first 400 cubic feet (3,000 gallons) of water and the first 400 cubic feet (3,000 gallons) of sewer services used each month. The annual discount is approximately \$540. Eligible households receive an additional 50% reduction in the monthly Clean Rivers Impervious Area Charge (CRIAC) and a waiver to cover 100% of the Water Service Replacement Fee. **Contact 202-535-2600 for CAP information.**

Next steps can include further investigation by OPC staff, or in the event of a complaint negotiations "stalemate," referral to the Public Service Commission (PSC) for investigation and a possible pre-hearing conference. If you are dissatisfied with the informal complaint resolution results, you may request a formal hearing at the PSC. After review of your complaint, an OPC attorney may represent you at the formal hearing, at no cost to you.

Consumers with high past due balances may qualify for a Time Payment Arrangement (TPA) with your utility service provider. OPC staff can help negotiate the first payment and monthly payment amounts needed to pay off the past due balance. Monthly TPA payments are made in addition to your regular monthly utility charges. Depending on the past due amount, a TPA is typically offered for 6-12 months. **For more information, talk with an OPC staff member at (202) 727-3071.**





# NEED MORE HELP?

If you have a utility problem that's not covered in this guide, contact the DC Office of the People's Counsel for more information or to file a complaint. **Call 202-727-3071**. File online at **[www.opc-dc.gov/](http://www.opc-dc.gov/)**.

**NOTE:** If you have already contacted the utility, the Public Service Commission (PSC) or other public official, such as your Councilmember or Advisory Neighborhood Commission, and have been unable to resolve your problem, contact OPC.

 202.727.3071 (Office)

 202.727.2876 (Hearing impaired)


 [www.opc-dc.gov](http://www.opc-dc.gov)

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