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.







#### 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.

- 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 "trued-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.
- 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.

**I** 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.





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



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.

- 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

 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 2 l 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.



#### GTHEP The following programs can assist low-income or cash-strapped consumers in paying utility bills. If you have questions, OPC Can Help! 202.727.3071

#### Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

Adams Morean | Columbia Height s Howard University | Kalorama | LeDroit Park | Mount Pleasant | Park View | Pleasant Plains | Shaw | Burl eth | Chinatown | Downtown | Dupont Circle | Federal Triangle | Foger Bot

The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, operated by the DC Department of Energy & Environment (DOEE), assists income-eligible District households with heating and cooling energy costs. Eligible households may receive energy bill assistance between \$250 and \$1,800 as a one-time regular energy assistance benefit. This benefit is based on household size, total household income, heating source and type of dwelling.

An emergency energy assistance benefit is available to low-income District residents who are currently disconnected from electric or natural gas service or have a depleted supply of home heating oil. Contact (202) 535-2600 to learn more.

#### Washington Area Fuel Fund (WAFF)

For more than 30 years, Washington Gas and The Salvation Army have partnered to operate the Washington Area Fuel Fund (WAFF). During the winter, WAFF assists people in financial need to pay for all types of fuelt to hast their homes. The Salvation Army disburses the funds through its 12 offices in the metropoltan region while Washington Gas pays all administrative, promotional and fundaising expenses. To learn more, residents in Wards 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 contact (202) 532-5009; msidents in Wards 7 and 8 contact (202) 678-7771.

#### Serving People by Lending A Supporting Hand (SPLASH)

SPLASH is a DC Water program that helps customers maintain critical water and sewer service in times of financial emergencies. SPLASH is funded solely by contributions from DC Water employees and customers. Contact (202) 354-3600 to learn more.

#### Customer Assistance Program (CAP)

OPEN

ng kidge | senning | survitte | Capitol View | beanwood | bupont hank | back Corner | backland Gardens | hairtax V

The Customer Assistance Programs are administered by the DC Department of Energy & Environment (DOEE). The original CAP provide algible DC Water austomers with a discource on the first 400 cubic feet (5,000 gallons) of wear and the first 400 cubic feet (5,000 gallons) of sewar 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 services used and the Contact 202 535-2600 for CAP Information.

#### Customer Assistance Program (CAP) II (CAP2

CAP2 provides eligible DC Water customers a discount on the first 300 cubic faet (2,250 gallons) of water and 300 cubic feet (2,250 gallons) of sewer services used each month, with the exception of the PILOT and ROW fees, and a 50% reduction in the monthly Clean Rivers Impervious Area Charge (CRIAC). The annual discount is approximately \$520.

#### Customer Assistance Program (CAP) III (CAP3)

CAP3 provides eligible DC Water customers with a discount of 75% off of the monthly CRIAC. The average annual discount is approximately \$2 10. The DOEE determines eligibility for all CAP programs based on federal low-income guidelines. Applicants must complete an application through DOEE.

#### About Consumer Complaints

When you contact the Office of the People's Counsel (OPC) with a utility complaint, a Consumer Outreach Spedalist will talk with you to get all the information about your complaint, your daytime contact info, and start an investigation on your behalf. When the results are available, usually within a week or two, staff will, contact you to review the results and discuss next steps, if needed.

Next steps can include further investigation by OPC staff, or in the event of a complaint negotiations "stalemate," referral to the Hubic 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.

obigan Park [ Morth Michigan Park ] Presisary Hill ] (Cueens Chapel ] كتابه ماها ] أن الملك المعاط ا

#### **Time Payment Arrangements**

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 trypically offered for 6-12 months. For more information, talk with an OPC staff memberat (202) 727-301.

st Federal Center IU Street Corridor IWest End Jámerican University Park IBerkley I Cathedral Heights | Chevy Chase I Clevel and Park I Colorry Hill | Forst Hills | Forst Hills | Forst Hills | Gover Park I Kent I Massachusetts Heights | Molean Gardens | Fort Dunor



is ( in the second provided and a second provided a second second second second second second provided a second s

# **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/**.

**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.



The DC Office of the People's Counsel extends special thanks to the Center for Urban Pedagogy, (welcometocup.org) New York's Utility Project—the Public Utility Law Project (PULP), and the New York State Public Service Commission Office of Consumer Services for their help in the design and development of this guide.