



Media Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Kandi Young, Public Information Officer
kandi.young@state.or.us, (503) 551-5290 cell phone

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UTILITY REGULATORS APPROVE PROGRAMS TO BENEFIT CUSTOMERS IMPACTED BY COVID-19 **Oregonians encouraged to contact service providers for debt relief program options**

SALEM, Ore. – The Oregon Public Utility Commission (PUC) has approved debt relief programs to benefit residential customers of investor-owned electric and natural gas utilities with past due balances caused by COVID-19. Portland General Electric’s (PGE’s) plan was approved on February 11, 2021, while the debt relief plans for PacifiCorp, Idaho Power, NW Natural, Avista, and Cascade Natural were approved by the PUC on March 23.

“Each of the utilities has established a debt relief program based on the needs of their customers,” said Megan Decker, PUC Chair. “The programs include matching fund programs, reconnection assistance, extended payment plans, and grant funding.”

The debt relief programs must be in place no later than April 1, 2021, with the exception of NW Natural, whose program goes into effect May 3. These programs will be ratepayer funded, following an agreement among a broad group of utilities, stakeholders, and PUC Staff to make one percent of each utility’s 2019 retail revenues in Oregon available for debt relief. This amounts to approximately \$39 million in total available funding across the six investor-owned electric and natural gas utilities.

“As Oregonians continue to be financially impacted by the pandemic, these debt relief programs are intended to keep those who need the most help connected to essential utility services without fear of past due balances or interruptions in service,” added Decker. “We encourage any customers experiencing financial hardship to reach out to their utility provider and take advantage of these programs. We also have asked utilities to redouble their efforts to reach customers through partnerships with community organizations, and to help eligible customers connect with community action agencies and other forms of energy assistance that may supplement these utility programs.”

As of January 2021, there were more than 91,000 customers of investor-owned electric and natural gas utilities who had past-due balances and were more than 90 days behind in paying their energy bills. This is a 252 percent increase when compared to data prior to the pandemic. Additionally, the total amount of past due balances for residential customers has increased to \$76.3 million, a 155 percent increase when compared to January 2020.

For a brief description of each utility’s debt relief programs and contact information, visit:
<https://www.oregon.gov/puc/Pages/Consumer-Information-Center.aspx>.

For additional information, contact the PUC at puc.consumer@state.or.us or call 503-378-6600 or 800-522-2404.

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Debt Relief Programs & Utility Contact Information

For: Portland General Electric, PacifiCorp, Idaho Power, Avista, Cascade Natural, and NW Natural

Investor-Owned Electric Utilities

Portland General Electric (PGE)

- 50/50 Plan – A one-time PGE bill payment to match a customer payment of an equal value.
- Three-Month Payment Match – PGE will match customer payments for up to three months or until the outstanding balance is \$0.
- Extended Match Program – PGE will match customer payments for up to 12 months if the customer enrolls in a Time Payment Arrangement Plan for up to 24 months.
- Customer Assistance – A one-time bill payment by PGE up to \$500 for qualifying customers to get their account current. This will cover any remaining balance for customers who received energy assistance through the Oregon Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).
- Reconnect Assistance – Once the disconnection moratorium expires, PGE will match a customer's payment to reconnect their disconnected service.

PGE customers are able to enroll in more than one of these programs up to a maximum benefit amount of \$1,000.

For more information, visit PortlandGeneral.com/matchmypayment or call PGE at 800-542-8818.

PacifiCorp (Pacific Power)

PacifiCorp customers may enroll in one of the following programs:

- Extended Payment Match – Qualifying customers who require long-term payment arrangements on past due balances will receive a monthly payment match up to \$1,000 for 12 months, until the past due balance is paid in full, or the \$1,000 maximum is met.
- Instant Grant – A one-time grant up to \$500 is offered to help customers pay off past due balances, reconnect service, or set up an extended payment plan.

For more information, call PacifiCorp at 888-221-7070.

Idaho Power

Idaho Power customers may enroll in one of the following programs:

- 40/60 Balance Split – A one-time grant for qualifying customers with larger past due balances who are able to make a lump sum payment of 40 percent of their balance. Idaho Power will then pay the remaining 60 percent of the balance up to \$1,200.
- Payment Arrangement Match – Relief to qualifying customers able to make payments over time. Idaho Power will match the payments up to a total of \$1,200 or 12 months.
- Instant Grant – A one-time credit/grant up to \$250 to provide immediate debt relief to qualifying customers with smaller past due balances.

For more information, call Idaho Power at 800-388-6040.

Investor-Owned Natural Gas Utilities

NW Natural

- Instant Grant – A one-time immediate grant up to \$300 to provide immediate debt relief for qualified customers with smaller past due balances.
- 50/50 Matching Grant – A one-time matching grant to provide debt relief, up to \$600, when their matching payment equal to 50 percent of the total balance is received.
- Time Payment Arrangement with Matching Grant – The customer enrolls in a time payment arrangement and receives a matching grant installment toward their past due balance each month their payment is received. The grant is equal to 50 percent of the total account balance, up to \$1,200, divided equally by the number of payments required by the time payment arrangement.

NW Natural customers may enroll (starting May 3, 2021) in more than one of the program options for a maximum program benefit of \$1,200.

For more information, call NW Natural at 800-422-4012 between 7 a.m. and 6 p.m. weekdays.

Avista

- Automatic Grant – Designed for customers with a history of low-income program eligibility, customers will automatically receive a one-time grant equal to the amount of their total past due balance up to \$1,500.
- Arrearage Forgiveness Grant – A one-time grant to forgive past due balances up to \$1,000 for customers who have received energy assistance with the last 24 months.

For more information, call Avista at 800-227-9187.

Cascade Natural Gas

- Automatic Hardship Grant – Designed for customers with a history of low-income program eligibility, qualified customers will automatically receive a one-time grant equal to the amount of their total past due balance up to \$1,500.
- Financial Hardship Grant – Designed for customers who have not received energy assistance in the last 24 months but is experiencing hardship due to COVID-19. Cascade Natural will determine the qualified customer's benefit amount based on household size, income, and account balance. The grant, not to exceed \$1,500, will be applied to the customer's past due balance.

For more information, call Cascade Natural at 888-522-1130.

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