



Media Release

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OREGON UTILITY REGULATORS SET JULY 31 END TO COVID-19 DISCONNECTION MORATORIUM **Utilities directed not to disconnect residential customers who are seeking financial assistance**

SALEM, Ore. – The Oregon Public Utility Commission (PUC) approved a final one-month extension to the moratorium on disconnections for electric and natural gas customers of investor-owned utilities, now set to end July 31, 2021. To help Oregonians still experiencing financial hardships due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the PUC directed utilities to use reasonable best efforts to avoid disconnecting residential customers who are seeking help through energy assistance or utility payment plans.

Under the PUC’s decision, disconnections due to nonpayment for customers of Oregon’s investor-owned electric and natural gas utilities—which includes Portland General Electric (PGE), PacifiCorp, Idaho Power, NW Natural, Cascade Natural, and Avista—may begin August 1, with the first 15-day late notice to be issued no earlier than July 16. This extension follows the Commission’s decision in March to approve ratepayer-funded debt relief programs to complement other sources of energy assistance available to COVID-impacted customers. In this decision, the Commission expressed a willingness to consider increasing ratepayer funding or other protections in utility territories where significant customer debt persist, so long as it is appropriately targeted. The Commission also directed utilities to make assistance options prominent in disconnection notices.

“COVID-19 has caused significant hardship for households that have struggled to pay their energy bills in the past and also for many who have never before sought assistance. Receiving a disconnection notice adds to the stress that these households are experiencing,” said Megan Decker, PUC Chair. “However, utility service cannot be provided at no cost, and customers with past due bills need to begin engaging now with utilities and assistance providers to get help and connect to payment options.”

As of April 2021, just under 87,000 electric and natural gas customers had 90-plus day past-due balances with investor-owned utilities. This is a 233 percent increase when compared to data prior to the pandemic, but a slight decrease when compared to December 2020 data. Additionally, the total amount of 90-day past due balances for residential customers has increased to \$67million, an 892 percent increase when compared to pre-pandemic levels.

“We have approved certain protections once the moratorium is lifted,” added Chair Decker. “Utilities are to make their best efforts not to disconnect customers who have taken steps with their utility service provider to participate in a utility debt relief program, to set up a time payment arrangement, to make partial payments, or who are actively seeking energy assistance from a partner organization.”

Customers having difficulty paying their utility bills should contact their service provider directly for information on debt relief programs, payment plan options, and programs specific for qualifying low-income customers. A list of available debt relief programs is also available at: <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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The Oregon Public Utility Commission (PUC) regulates customer rates and services of the state's investor-owned electric, natural gas and telephone utilities, as well as select water companies. The PUC mission is to ensure Oregon utility customers have access to safe, reliable, and high quality utility services at just and reasonable rates, which is accomplished through thorough analysis and independent decision-making conducted in an open and fair process.