



Media Release

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OREGON PUC APPROVES REVISED RULES TO BETTER PROTECT CUSTOMERS AT RISK OF UTILITY SERVICE DISCONNECTION

SALEM, Ore. – The Oregon Public Utility Commission (PUC) recently approved rule revisions intended to strengthen protections for low-income energy customers at risk of service disconnection due to nonpayment. These rules are specific to Oregon’s investor-owned energy utilities, including Portland General Electric, PacifiCorp, Idaho Power, NW Natural, Cascade Natural, and Avista. The PUC approved the following:

- Changes to the rule defining disconnection of service to ensure vulnerable populations are protected
- Adjustments to the language defining what actions a utility has to take before disconnecting a customer that offers to pay cash at the door
- Waiving select charges for low-income customers
- Extension of the period of time required to notify customers of a disconnection of service due to nonpayment

Disconnection of Service -- The PUC approved changes to the rule to postpone the disconnection of service any time a temperature of less than 32 degrees is forecasted during the colder months of November through March or when a winter storm warning is in effect. The previous rule required a pause in disconnection only if a high temperature of less than 32 degrees was forecasted, which did not take into account very cold days that may have a high that reaches 32 degrees. The rule now also indicates utilities are unable to disconnect service for nonpayment when a customer is under certain wildfire evacuation notices and when the air quality index is at or above 100. Utilities can now only disconnect service between the hours of 8 a.m. and 2 p.m. to allow for same-day reconnection of service for customers.

Paying Outstanding Bills to Avoid Disconnection – The previous rule allowed energy utilities, when arriving at a home to disconnect service due to an outstanding bill, to collect a reasonable partial payment of the overdue balance at the door to prevent disconnection. The rule now requires that any energy utility with a policy not to accept payment at the door be required to notify customers of the options available to pay the outstanding balance and be provided at least 24 hours to make the payment.

Waiving Select Charges for Low-Income Customers – The PUC approved changes to the rule to prohibit utilities from imposing late payment charges and collecting deposits. Additionally, select reconnection fees will also now be waived for qualifying low-income customers.

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Docket No.: [AR 653](#)

Disconnection Notice Extension – Utility customers at risk of disconnection are now required to receive notification from their utility service provider at least 20 days in advance of a disconnect. This change to the rule provides customers more time to prepare for a pending disconnection and ability to pay the outstanding balance to avoid disconnection.

“We appreciate the efforts of PUC Staff, utilities, and stakeholders who were very involved in the process of updating these rules,” noted Mark Thompson, PUC Commissioner. “This is a good step forward in improving the protections that are afforded customers experiencing financial and other difficulties. These updates reflect the need to change business as usual to better recognize the fact that people rely on their utility services to sustain life, while still providing for an orderly way to terminate services only where that becomes absolutely necessary.”

Customers with questions about billing or utility service can contact the PUC’s Consumer Services Team at 800-522-2404 or puc.consumer@puc.oregon.gov.

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The PUC regulates customer rates and services of the state’s investor-owned electric and natural gas utilities, including Portland General Electric, Idaho Power, Pacific Power, Avista, Cascade Natural, and NW Natural. The PUC also regulates landline telephone providers and select water companies. The PUC’s mission is to ensure Oregonians have access to safe, reliable, and fairly priced utility services that advance state policy and promote the public interest. We use an inclusive process to evaluate differing viewpoints and visions of the public interest and arrive at balanced, well-reasoned, independent decisions supported by fact and law. For more information about the PUC, visit oregon.gov/puc.