

**I can't pay my bill.
Can the utility shut off my
electricity, gas or water?**

If you don't pay your bill, your electricity, gas or water service may be terminated. However, you have some rights in this situation:

▶ **Seven days before shutting off service**, the utility must send you a **written notice**.

▶ **One day before shutting off service**, the utility must make a **diligent attempt** to contact you by calling you or coming to your home.

▶ The utility cannot terminate service at night or during the weekend.

▶ If the utility knows that **minors, elderly persons, or infirm persons** live in your household, your electricity or gas cannot be shut off **during winter months** (December, January, or February). The utility has to get special permission from the PUC to do so.

If you cannot afford to pay your bill, you must still make reasonable efforts to negotiate payment arrangements with the utility. *If you are having trouble making payment arrangements with the utility directly, call the PUC immediately.*

Can my service be shut off because someone else didn't pay their bill?

No. The utility cannot terminate your service for the unpaid bill of another customer.

**My landlord or the owner of my
manufactured home community pays
my utility bills.
Can they shut off my service?**

No. A landlord or owner of a manufactured home community cannot shut off utility service to try to evict you. You have a right to have the utility service put in your own name if s/he tries to evict you in this way.

**My utility charged me a deposit
before they turned on my service.
Can they do that?**

Usually, no. However, a utility *may* charge a deposit when they turn on your service if you had your service terminated for non-payment at previous address.

**How long do I have
to pay my utility bill?**

A utility can set a due date for 15 days after you receive the bill. Some utilities allow more time. If you need more time than this, you can receive an **automatic 15-day extension** by sending a letter to the utility. Use the following letter as an example:

[DATE]
Dear [NAME OF UTILITY COMPANY],
Paying my utility bill within 15 days creates a hardship because of when I receive my income payment.
Please allow me 30 days to pay my bill each month.
Sincerely,
[CUSTOMER NAME]
[ADDRESS] [ACCOUNT #]

You can ask for an Installment Plan.
You also have the right to pay a large bill in reasonable installments. Some utilities also allow a **budget payment plan** where you set a monthly amount. Talk to your utility and try to work out a plan. Tell them your income, and what and how often you can reasonably pay.

If that fails, file a complaint with the PUC by following the **procedure** described in this brochure. →

**I'll get sick without heat, electricity,
gas or water. What can I do?**

If termination of gas, water or electricity will **aggravate an existing medical condition or create a medical emergency**, the utility will not shut off service for **30 days**. You will have to give the utility a **Medical Extension Letter** from your **doctor** or a public health official. Use the following letter as an example:

[DATE]
Dear [NAME OF UTILITY COMPANY],
The termination of utility service to [CUSTOMER NAME], who lives at [ADDRESS], will aggravate a medical condition for [CUSTOMER]. The nature of the medical condition is _____.
Additionally, it will create a medical emergency for [CUSTOMER].
Sincerely,
Dr. _____

You can also file a second medical extension letter to receive a second 30 day extension.

**What can I do if I have a
problem with a utility?**

You have a **right to file a complaint** with the PUC if are dissatisfied about your electricity, gas, or water service, or don't agree with a termination notice or a demand for deposit.

Follow this **procedure**:

▶ 1. First, try to work it out with the utility in writing or in person.

▶ 2. If that doesn't work, file a complaint with the PUC by sending them a letter. Use the following letter as an example:

[DATE]
Dear Public Utilities Commission:
I am filing a complaint against [NAME OF UTILITY COMPANY] concerning the proposed termination of my utility service.
I tried to resolve the matter with [UTILITY COMPANY] but could not.
I certify that I have sent a copy of this letter to [UTILITY COMPANY].
Sincerely,
[CUSTOMER NAME]
[ADDRESS] [ACCOUNT #]

▶ 3. Once a complaint is filed, the utility can NOT terminate your electricity, gas, or water until the PUC makes a decision about the complaint.

WARNING!!!

Do NOT use a false name to get utility service.

Do NOT use a minor child's name to get utility service.

Use of a minor child's name to get utility service can negatively impact their credit and impact their ability to get jobs, housing, or credit when they turn 18.

Do NOT try to hide a previous unpaid bill from the utility.

If you are dishonest with the utility when you first applied for service, the utility can shut off your service, and it will be difficult to get service again.

As long as you are honest with the utility, you have a good chance of working out any payment problems with the utility's credit manager or through the PUC.

If you have any questions about these rules or your rights regarding utility bills, call or write the **Idaho Public Utilities Commission (PUC)**.

The PUC is a state agency established to make sure the utilities in Idaho treat all of their customers fairly.

Idaho Public Utilities Commission

472 W. Washington
Boise, ID 83702

General 334-0300
Complaints 334-0369

You can also submit a complaint or question electronically
<http://www.puc.idaho.gov/forms/cons/cons.html>

- Call **211**, Idaho's CareLine, for more information on utilities.
- If you are having trouble paying your fuel bills, you may be eligible for assistance through your **local county welfare system**. Contact your county commissioners.
- You may also seek help through a local agency that administers the **Fuel Crisis Program**.

Local Offices

Boise 345-0106
310 N. 5th St.

Caldwell 454-2591
1104 Blaine St.

Coeur d'Alene 667-9559
410 Sherman Ave., #303

Idaho Falls 524-3660
482 Constitution Way, # 101

Lewiston 743-1556
633 Main St., # 103

Pocatello 233-0079
150 S. Arthur Ave., # 203

Twin Falls 734-7024
475 Polk St., # 4

Statewide Hotlines

Idaho Senior Legal Hotline

1-866-345-0106
(*en español* 1-866-954-2591)

Idaho Domestic Violence Legal Hotline

1-877-500-2980

TTY (Deaf and Hearing Impaired)

1-800-245-7573

Idaho Rental Assistance & Properties:

1-877-428-8844

www.housingidaho.com

Looking for more information?

Visit www.idaholegalaid.org to find more free forms and information for renters.

Find the Idaho Attorney General's manual, **Landlord and Tenant Guidelines**, at <http://www.ag.idaho.gov>

Revised 1/13

Advice for Idaho Renters and Homeowners:

Utility Bills

Read this handout to understand:

- ▶ **What if I can't pay my utility bill?**
- ▶ **Can my utilities be shut off?**
- ▶ **How can I protect my rights?**

The **Idaho Public Utilities Commission (PUC)** is a state agency established to make sure the utilities in Idaho treat all of their customers fairly. It adopts rules that apply to residential customers of **investor-owned utilities** such as:

- Idaho Power
- Avista Utilities
- Intermountain Gas
- Utah Power & Light
- Pacific Power & Light
- Citizens Utility
- United Water

This handout briefly summarizes the rules. The rules don't apply to cooperative utilities or municipally owned utilities. Call **211**, Idaho's CareLine, for more information.

*The advice in this handout is very general and there might be special factors in your case. If you have legal questions, contact an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, contact the **Idaho Legal Aid Services** office nearest you using one of the phone numbers on the back of this handout. Also, visit us on the web at:*

www.idaholegalaid.org