



## CONSUMER RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

### RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES SUMMARY FOR OREGON UTILITY CONSUMERS

If you are applying for service or have service with a utility company in Oregon, you have certain rights and obligations. Following is a summary of those rights and obligations prepared by the Consumer Services Section of the Public Utility Commission. The matters described here apply only to electricity, natural gas, telephone and water services regulated by the PUC.

The utility company's main obligation is to provide you with reliable services at rates approved by the PUC. Your main obligations are to pay for the services you use, to not damage or tamper with the company's facilities, and to notify the company if you move, if you wish to change your service or if you have a problem.

**DEPOSITS:** The utility may ask you to pay a deposit. If a deposit is required, you may have the right to pay it in several installments.

**THIRD-PARTY NOTICES:** You have the option to ask that another person receive your bills and notices if, for some reason, you are unable to receive or understand those bills and notices. Also, you may ask your utility company to furnish you with notices in another language if you do not understand English.

**FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE:** Several programs provide financial help, depending on your circumstances. The Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) provides money to qualified customers who need help with winter heating bills. Also, the major energy utility companies have their own financial assistance programs to help their customers. The Oregon Telephone Assistance Program (OTAP) provides reduced phone bills for qualified low-income customers. The Link-Up America program provides financial help with telephone service installation charges for qualified persons.

**DISCONNECTION NOTICES:** Before a utility company can disconnect your service, the company must notify you. Electric and gas companies are required to give you a 15-day notice, another notice 5 days before disconnection, and must try to contact you the day the disconnection is scheduled. Telephone and water utilities must provide written notice at least 5 days before service is disconnected.

**MEDICAL CERTIFICATES:** If you or a member of your household has a serious health problem and your utility service is threatened, you may obtain a medical certificate from your doctor or other medical professional who provides your health care. A medical certificate will prevent immediate disconnection of your service and requires your utility to allow you to set up a payment plan to pay any overdue bill. (Medical certificates do not apply to water utilities.)

**PAYMENT PLANS:** You may take advantage of one of several special payment options designed to make it easier to pay your electricity or natural gas utility bills. You may pay your bills on an equal-payment plan which will spread out your payments over the year. If you are unable to pay your electricity or gas bills for a period of time and your utility intends to cut off your service, you may also enter into a special agreement to pay the overdue amount over a period of time.

**LATE CHARGES:** Customers are responsible for paying their utility bills on time. Under certain circumstances, utilities may add late-payment charges to bills not paid on time.

**TELEPHONE SOLICITATION:** The Federal government has in place a national "No Call" list for persons who do not want to receive unwanted phone calls from persons or companies trying to sell products and services. You will need to register with the

Federal Trade Commission (FTC). After you register, your phone number to be placed on the No-Call list it will show up on the registry by the next day. Telemarketers will have up to three months to remove your phone number. Your phone number will remain in the registry for five years from the date you sign up. More details are available at [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov).

**RESOLVING DISPUTES:** If you have a dispute with your utility company that is not resolved by contacting the company, the PUC 's Consumer Services Section is available to help you. You may contact the PUC by calling toll free 1-800-522-2404.

**CONSUMER ASSISTANCE ORGANIZATIONS:** Listings of consumer assistance organizations that participate in Commission proceedings, including addresses and telephone numbers, may be requested from the Commission's Consumer Services Section at 1-800-522-2404.

If you have questions about any of the matters described in this summary, please contact your local utility company or the PUC Consumer Services Section. If you do not speak English, please try to arrange in advance for an interpreter to help you. While utilities and the PUC are sensitive to special needs of persons who do not speak English, their offices may not have someone available who speaks your primary language.