

Suggested citation if referencing the below information: Sanya Carley and David Konisky, 2023, "Utility Disconnections Dashboard," Energy Justice Lab.



Washington

Last updated: October 10, 2023

Covered utilities: These policies pertain to electricity customers who receive their service from an investor-owned utility, a municipal utility, or an electric cooperative in the State of Washington.

Rev. Code Wash. § 80.04.010; WAC 480-100-00.3

Weather Protections

For low-income customers, where household income is not higher than the maximum allowed for eligibility under the state's plan for Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), disconnections will not take place between November 15th – March 15th each year so long as the customer provides a notice of income and enrolls in a payment plan. Customers must pay back what they owe by the following October 15th, or they will be ineligible for this protection in the future until late bills are paid.

A utility must establish conditions in its tariff(s) under which the utility will cease nonvoluntary service disconnections during inclement weather events.

A utility may not disconnect residential customers on any day during which the national weather service has issued or has announced that it intends to issue a heat-related alert.

WAC 480-100-128; WAC 480-100-143; ARCW 35.21.300; ARCW 80.28.010; ARCW 54.16.285 ARCW 54.16.285

Medical Protections

Disconnections will be delayed for up to 60 days if the termination of service will aggravate an existing medical condition, according to a qualified medical professional. Medical certificates can be issued by a licensed physician, a nurse practitioner, or physician's assistant. Medical certificates must include an explanation of how the current medical condition will be aggravated by disconnection of service, a statement of how long the condition is expected to last and the title, signature, and telephone number of the person certifying the condition.

Customers can enter into a payment agreement to receive this medical protection. In addition, disconnections will be delayed for up to 5 business days if the customer notifies the utility that they intend to obtain a medical certificate.

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WAC § 480-100-128

Other Customer Protections

There are no specific protections for households with children, elderly residents, individuals with disabilities, or military personnel.

General Exemptions

Customers and utilities can request an exemption from the rules for reasons of hardship.

WAC 480-07-110; WAC 480-100-00.8

Notification Requirements

Written notification of at least 8 days is required from a utility before a customer may be disconnected. In-person notifications are not required, but utilities should make the attempt to notify customers by telephone. In addition, a utility is not required to delay a disconnection if it is unable to reach a customer by a telephone call or an in-person visit.

WAC § 480-100-128

Payment Information, Delinquency, and Fee Information

Customers have a minimum of 15 days after the bill was issued to make a payment.

There are no minimum arrearages before a utility may disconnect a customer.

Customer may be charged fees associated with a disconnection. Reconnection fees are prohibited.

Utilities may provide customers with payment plans.

WAC § 480-90-178; WAC 480-90-133; WAC § 480-100-143

Landlords and Tenants

When the landlord of a housing unit is the account holder, tenants receive the same protections as other customers. Utilities must provide 5 days past the original disconnection date in the event that there is a master meter or if they suspect they are providing service to a person other than the customer of record.

WAC 480-100-128 (4) (i)

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Availability of Protection Policies

Utilities and public utility commissions are required to provide information on available sources of financial assistance.

In addition, utilities must provide customers with information on their protections along with disconnection notices. Each customer must receive a brochure describing the "disconnection of service initiated by the utility", among other things, upon application for electric service. At least once per year, the utility will inform customers how to gain access to this brochure and a copy of the electric rules under chapter 480-100 WAC.

WAC § 480-100-128; WAC § 480-100-103