

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



Rhode Island

Last updated: November 6, 2023

Covered utilities: These regulations shall apply to all individuals, partnerships, associations, corporations, municipalities, and cooperatives which are under the jurisdiction of the Public Utilities Commission and which own or operate electric, gas, or water utilities in the State of Rhode Island. They shall apply only to residential customers of the public utility and shall not be applicable to commercial or industrial customers.

810-RICR- 10-00-1.3

Weather Protections

During winter (Nov. 1 to Apr.15), there shall be no shutoff for any customer unless the customer's arrearage is more than \$500. (If electricity is not the main source of heat, then the amount must be more than \$200). The arrearage must have been left unpaid for at least 10 days after the due date. In addition, there shall be no shutoff at all for Protected Status Customers during winter. Protected Status Customers include the unemployed, elderly, handicapped, seriously ill, LIHEAP recipients, and households facing financial hardship with children under age 2.

No shutoff if the National Weather Service has issued a heat advisory or excessive heat warning for Rhode Island.

810-RICR- 10-00-1.17, 810-RICR- 10-00-1.4, 810-RICR- 10-00-1.2

Medical Protections

Service shall not be disconnected in Rhode Island if a customer is seriously ill. "Seriously ill" means the customer has a life-threatening illness or one that will cause irreversible adverse consequences to human health or has the potential to do either. A medical certificate must be provided from a licensed physician with details such as the nature of the illness and its likely duration. Shutoff will be delayed for three weeks. If the duration of the illness exceeds three weeks from the certification to the public utility, the customer may request a review to determine whether the initial exemption shall continue, for how long, and under what circumstances.

810-RICR- 10-00-1.4, 810-RICR- 10-00-1.2

Other Customer Protections

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No electric company shall terminate electric service in any residence in which there is domiciled a person under the age of two (2) years and the customer's service has not been previously shut off for nonpayment before the birth of the child; provided, that the customer cannot afford to pay any overdue bill because of financial hardship. (Financial hardship is defined as a combined gross income equal to or less than seventy-five percent of the Rhode Island median income.) See also winter protections.

The elderly cannot have their power shutoff during winter. During the rest of the year, they cannot be shutoff unless the utility obtains approval from the Division of Public Utilities and Carriers. An elderly person is defined as anyone over age 62.

Disabled persons cannot have their power shutoff during winter. During the rest of the year, they cannot be shutoff unless the utility obtains approval from the Division of Public Utilities and Carriers. Disability is defined as a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more of such person's major life activities, and which would ordinarily prove a serious hindrance to obtaining employment. This impairment is material, rather than slight, relatively static as distinguished from definitely active or rapidly progressive, and relatively permanent in that it is seldom fully corrected by medical replacement, therapy or surgical means.

There are no specific protections for military households.

810-RICR- 10-00-1.4(L), 810-RICR- 10-00-1.2; 810-RICR- 10-00-1.4(G,K), 810-RICR- 10-00-1.2

General Exemptions

The Public Utilities Commission or Administrator of the Division of Public Utilities and Carriers retains the jurisdiction to grant an exception to the provisions of these regulations to any party for good cause shown.

810-RICR- 10-00-1.15

Notification Requirements

Customers must be given at least 10 days of notice before their disconnection. Written and telephone notifications are required in at least some circumstances. In-person notice is not required.

810-RICR- 10-00-1.5, 810-RICR- 10-00-1.4(F)

Payment Information, Delinquency, and Fee Information

The statutory code and administrative code do not specify how long customers have to pay their bills, nor at what point those bills become late.

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In addition to the minimum arrearage conditions specified for winter, during the rest of the year, an electric distribution company, but not including the Block Island Power Company or the Pascoag Utility District, shall not shut off service to a household eligible for LIHEAP if the customer's outstanding bill is three hundred dollars (\$300) or less and not more than two (2) months in arrears.

Customers may be charged fees associated with a disconnection or a reconnection.

Payment plans are available to customers.

R.I. Gen. Laws § 39-1.1-1, 810-RICR- 10-00-1.7, 810-RICR- 10-00-1.5

Landlords and Tenants

The statutory and administrative code does not specify whether tenants, if the landlord is listed as the customer, receive different treatment from utilities than other customers.

Availability of Protection Policies

Customers are notified of customer protections at the time of disconnection notice. Additionally, notification of winter protections will be sent out annually, one month before the winter period begins and again two months before it ends. Utilities must provide information to customers on available sources of financial assistance.

810-RICR- 10-00-1.5, 810-RICR- 10-00-1.8