



## Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

Your Residential Utility Consumer Advocate

# CONSUMERS' FACT SHEET

### Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

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# KEEP UTILITIES ON WITH A MEDICAL CERTIFICATION WAIVER

If you have a health condition that would be affected by disconnected utility services, you should communicate with your doctors to assure your health is not at risk. Planning ahead and communicating special needs are key.

State law prevents utilities from disconnecting a consumer's electric and natural gas services for nonpayment if a permanent member of the household has a medical condition defined as "especially dangerous" to health and the consumer has a medical certification waiver on file with the utility company.

In some cases, electric companies can give preference to prevent disconnection or establish a reconnection of utility service to individuals who rely on life support devices, such as respirators, ventilators or other medical equipment. Since there is no guarantee that these customers will receive power immediately, they should always have a backup plan in place.

### Medical certifications

Medical certifications can be used to prevent a utility disconnection up to three times during a 12-month period or to reconnect service if the customer has been disconnected for no more than 21 days. Certification forms must be completed for each case of disconnection or reconnection. The

waiver is valid for 30 days and forms are available from the utility.

**The certification must be signed by a licensed physician, physician assistant, clinical nurse specialist, certified nurse practitioner, certified nurse-midwife or a local board of health physician.** Generally, the medical personnel will fax or mail the completed form to the utility company.

If a medical certification is received prior to 3:30 p.m., service will be restored the same day if it has been disconnected. If it is received after 3:30 p.m., service will be restored at the earliest time possible the following day. If the medical certification is received after 3:30 p.m. on a day that precedes a non-business day, the utility will make every effort to restore service by the end of the day.

The responsibility for determining whether a condition warrants a medical certification lies exclusively with the medical professional – not the utility or the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC). This determination is made by the doctor consulting with the patient. There are no income guidelines associated with the use of a medical certification waiver. The waiver can be used for either electric or natural gas utilities or both. Investor-owned water companies also offer medical certification waivers. For more details

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The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC), the residential utility consumer advocate, represents the interests of 4.5 million households in proceedings before state and federal regulators and in the courts.

The state agency also educates consumers about electric, natural gas, telephone and water issues.

For more information, please visit the OCC website at [www.occ.ohio.gov](http://www.occ.ohio.gov).



*The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel is an equal opportunity employer and provider of services.*

contact your utility company directly or the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio Consumer Call Center hotline at (800) 686-PUCO (7826).

### **Payment Plans**

Medical certifications can postpone a disconnection, but customers are still required to pay for electric and/or natural gas services, even while the medical certification was in effect.

Consumers with a medical condition who also are experiencing difficulty paying their utility bills have options available to them other than a medical certification. For income eligible consumers, these include PIPP Plus (Percentage of Income Payment Plan), Emergency Home Energy Assistance Program (E-HEAP) and the annual Winter Reconnect Order issued by the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio. For all customers, the utilities are required to offer alternative payment plans. The local community action agencies can help establish payment arrangements between the consumer and the utility company.

Missed PIPP Plus payments must be made as part of the annual verification process to remain on PIPP Plus. Consumers who use a medical certification must pay any missed payments to remain on the PIPP Plus program. Also, a PIPP Plus customer does not receive credit on current or historic arrearages when using a medical certification.

### **Additional Information for Customers with Medical Needs during Power Outages**

Customers with special medical needs should talk with their doctors to determine if their medical condition should be made known to the utility companies in the event of a disconnection, power outage during a storm, or another disruption of the customer's utility service. Customers

classified as medically "at-risk" can be placed on a critical customer list with their utility company. This list is used as part of an emergency management plan to identify addresses where there may be people with special medical needs. Electric utilities maintain these lists and notify customers periodically about options and responsibilities during outages.

In such cases, the electric utilities, being made aware of a customer's confirmed medical needs, can prioritize accordingly as part of the emergency planning effort. Being on the critical customer list does not guarantee priority restoration in the event of an outage, so one should always have a backup plan in place. In addition to verifying medical status with the utility, those in need should contact any of the available social service assistance organizations or the local office of the American Red Cross for help.

## **Contact the utilities:**

**American Electric Power**  
1-800-272-2177

**Columbia Gas of Ohio**  
1-800-344-4077

**Dayton Power & Light**  
1-800-433-8500

**Dominion East Ohio**  
1-800-362-7557

**Duke Energy Ohio**  
1-800-648-7777

**FirstEnergy**

**Cleveland Electric Illuminating**  
1-800-589-3101

**Ohio Edison**  
1-800-633-4766

**Toledo Edison**  
1-800-477-3333

**Vectren Energy Delivery**  
1-800-227-1376