

**RCW 80.28.010 Duties as to rates, services, and facilities—
Limitations on termination of utility service for residential heating
and of electric or water utility service during heat-related alerts.**

(1) All charges made, demanded or received by any gas company, electrical company, wastewater company, or water company for gas, electricity or water, or for any service rendered or to be rendered in connection therewith, shall be just, fair, reasonable and sufficient. Reasonable charges necessary to cover the cost of administering the collection of voluntary donations for the purposes of supporting the development and implementation of evergreen community management plans and ordinances under RCW 80.28.300 must be deemed as prudent and necessary for the operation of a utility.

(2) Every gas company, electrical company, wastewater company, and water company shall furnish and supply such service, instrumentalities and facilities as shall be safe, adequate and efficient, and in all respects just and reasonable.

(3) All rules and regulations issued by any gas company, electrical company, wastewater company, or water company, affecting or pertaining to the sale or distribution of its product or service, must be just and reasonable.

(4) Utility service for residential space heating shall not be terminated between November 15 through March 15 if the customer:

(a) Notifies the utility of the inability to pay the bill. This notice should be provided within five business days of receiving a payment overdue notice unless there are extenuating circumstances. If the customer fails to notify the utility within five business days and service is terminated, the customer can, by fulfilling the requirements of this section, receive the protections of this chapter;

(b) Provides self-certification of household income for the prior twelve months to a grantee of the department of commerce, which administers federally funded energy assistance programs. The grantee shall determine that the household income does not exceed the maximum allowed for eligibility under the state's plan for low-income energy assistance under 42 U.S.C. 8624 and shall provide a dollar figure that is seven percent of household income. The grantee may verify information provided in the self-certification;

(c) Has applied for home heating assistance from applicable government and private sector organizations and certifies that any assistance received will be applied to the current bill and future utility bills;

(d) Has applied for low-income weatherization assistance to the utility or other appropriate agency if such assistance is available for the dwelling;

(e) Agrees to a payment plan and agrees to maintain the payment plan. The plan will be designed both to pay the past due bill by the following October 15th and to pay for continued utility service. If the past due bill is not paid by the following October 15, the customer is not eligible for protections under this chapter until the past due bill is paid. The plan may not require monthly payments in excess of seven percent of the customer's monthly income plus one-twelfth of any arrearage accrued from the date application is made and thereafter during November 15 through March 15. A customer may agree to pay a higher percentage during this period, but shall not be in default unless payment during this period is less than seven percent of monthly income plus one-twelfth of any arrearage accrued from the date application is made and thereafter. If assistance payments are

received by the customer subsequent to implementation of the plan, the customer shall contact the utility to reformulate the plan; and

(f) Agrees to pay the moneys owed even if the customer moves.

(5) The utility shall:

(a) Include in any notice that an account is delinquent and that service may be subject to termination, a description of the customer's duties in this section;

(b) Assist the customer in fulfilling the requirements under this section;

(c) Be authorized to transfer an account to a new residence when a customer who has established a plan under this section moves from one residence to another within the same utility service area;

(d) Be permitted to disconnect service if the customer fails to honor the payment program except on the days indicated in subsection (8) of this section. Utilities may continue to disconnect service for those practices authorized by law other than for nonpayment as provided for in this subsection. Customers who qualify for payment plans under this section who default on their payment plans and are disconnected can be reconnected and maintain the protections afforded under this chapter by paying all amounts that would have been due and owing under the terms of the applicable payment plan, absent default, on the date on which service is reconnected; and

(e) Advise the customer in writing at the time it disconnects service that it will restore service if the customer contacts the utility and fulfills the other requirements of this section.

(6) A payment plan implemented under this section is consistent with RCW 80.28.080.

(7) Every gas company and electrical company shall offer residential customers the option of a budget billing or equal payment plan. The budget billing or equal payment plan shall be offered low-income customers eligible under the state's plan for low-income energy assistance prepared in accordance with 42 U.S.C. 8624(C)(1) without limiting availability to certain months of the year, without regard to the length of time the customer has occupied the premises, and without regard to whether the customer is the tenant or owner of the premises occupied.

(8)(a) Every electrical company and water company must have and must abide by the terms of a tariff approved by the commission that prohibits the electrical company or water company from effecting, due to lack of payment, an involuntary termination of electric or water utility service to any residential user, including tenants of metered apartment buildings and residents of mobile homes, on any day for which the national weather service has issued or has announced that it intends to issue a heat-related alert, such as an excessive heat warning, a heat advisory, an excessive heat watch, or a similar alert, for the area in which the residential user's address is located.

(b) Nothing in this subsection (8) limits the authority of the commission to prohibit an electrical company or water company from terminating electric or water utility service in accordance with an approved tariff, rule, or order, in circumstances independent of the weather.

(9)(a) A residential user at whose dwelling electric or water utility service has been disconnected for lack of payment may request that the utility reconnect service on any day for which the national weather service has issued or has announced that it intends to issue a heat-related alert, such as an excessive heat warning, a heat advisory, an excessive heat watch, or a similar alert, for the area in

which the residential user's address is located. The utility shall, through a process approved by the commission, inform all customers in the notice of disconnection of the ability to seek reconnection and provide clear and specific information on how to make that request, including how to contact the utility.

(b) Upon receipt of a request made pursuant to (a) of this subsection, the utility shall promptly make a reasonable attempt to reconnect service to the dwelling. The utility, in connection with a request made pursuant to (a) of this subsection, may require the residential user to enter into a payment plan prior to reconnecting service to the dwelling. If the utility requires the residential user to enter into a repayment plan, the repayment plan must comply with subsection (10) of this section.

(10) A repayment plan required by a utility pursuant to subsection (9)(b) of this section will be designed both to pay the past due bill by the following May 15th, or as soon as possible after May 15th if needed to maintain monthly payments that are no greater than six percent of the customer's monthly income, and to pay for continued utility service. The plan may not require monthly payments in excess of six percent of the customer's monthly income. A customer may agree to pay a higher percentage during this period, but will not be in default unless payment during this period is less than six percent of the customer's monthly income. If assistance payments are received by the customer subsequent to implementation of the plan, the customer shall contact the utility to reformulate the plan.

(11) Every gas company, electrical company, wastewater company, and water company shall construct and maintain such facilities in connection with the manufacture and distribution of its product, or provision of its services, as will be efficient and safe to its employees and the public.

(12) An agreement between the customer and the utility, whether oral or written, does not waive the protections afforded under this chapter.

(13) In establishing rates or charges for water service, water companies as defined in RCW 80.04.010 may consider the achievement of water conservation goals and the discouragement of wasteful water use practices.

(14) On an annual basis, each utility must submit a report to the commission that includes the total number of electric or water disconnections that occurred on each day for which the national weather service issued, or announced that it intended to issue, a heat-related alert. [2023 c 105 s 6; 2011 c 214 s 11; 2008 c 299 s 35; 1995 c 399 s 211. Prior: 1991 c 347 s 22; 1991 c 165 s 4; 1990 1st ex.s. c 1 s 5; 1986 c 245 s 5; 1985 c 6 s 25; 1984 c 251 s 4; 1961 c 14 s 80.28.010; prior: 1911 c 117 s 26; RRS s 10362.]

Findings—Purpose—Limitation of chapter—Effective date—2011 c 214: See notes following RCW 80.04.010.

Short title—2008 c 299: See note following RCW 76.15.020.

Purposes—1991 c 347: See note following RCW 90.42.005.

Findings—1991 c 165: See note following RCW 35.21.300.