

# Our Goals for the PUC Rule Change Meeting

## Winter Shutoff Moratorium

Here's what we're asking for:

1. The winter moratorium period should last from November to April. It's cold in Idaho longer than just December to February.
2. If your power got turned off before the moratorium starts, and you qualify for the moratorium, the utility should turn the power back on for November to April. They shouldn't be allowed to get around the rule by turning your power off the week before the moratorium starts.

## Medical Certificate

Here's what we're asking for:

1. You should be allowed to get a certificate from nurse-practitioners and physician's assistants, not just doctors.
2. The time period is too limited now. A chronic illness is an illness that lasts a long time, so it's silly that the rule just gives you 30 days and the possibility to renew once for 30 more days. In Oregon, the certificate is good for as long as the illness or emergency lasts, no more than 6 months for an emergency, and no more than 12 months for a chronic illness. There's no limit to the number of times you can renew. That's what we want – it's just common sense.

## Days and Times of Termination

Here's what we want:

1. no shutoffs on Fridays or days before legal holidays
2. no shutoffs after 4 pm any day. When the utility shuts off the power after business hours, it charges extra fees for the after-hours shut-off, then extra fees to restore the power after hours. That means low income families have to choose between spending money they don't have and freezing all night.

## Timing of Shutoff Notices

Right now, the rule is that the utility has to send you written notice 7 days before shutoff and try to get in person or by phone 24 hours before shutoff.

Here's what we want:

1. The utility should send written notice 2 weeks ahead of time, to give people in rural areas time to get the money together and get it to an office. The utilities have closed down a lot of service stations around the state and it's harder to get to them if you're working full time, have transportation problems, or have a disability.
2. the utility should have to try to contact you in person or by phone at least twice within 24 hours of shutoff. They should keep records of these attempts for 45 days, so that the PUC can check that they're following the rule.

## **Shut-Off Notices**

Here's what we want:

1. the notice should say what time the utility plans to shut off the service, so people can try to be at the house when the employee arrives
2. the notice should explain the Hardship Exemption, Winter Moratorium and Medical Certificate so people know to apply for these exceptions to shutoffs.
3. the notice should include this section written in the languages other than English most commonly used in the area:

**IMPORTANT NOTICE: Your electric service will be shut off because of an unpaid bill on your account. You must call immediately to avoid shut off. If you are unable to read this bill, please have someone translate it for you. If you are unable to find someone to translate this notice, call NAME at NUMBER who will help you. Information about your rights as a customer and ways to stop your shut off are also available in this language. CALL NOW TO STOP YOUR SHUT OFF.**

## **Customer Rights and Responsibilities**

Currently, the rule requires that utilities provide customers with a statement of rights and responsibilities when they open an account, and then once a year.

Here's what we want:

- the utility should add to the statement:
  1. how to prevent having your power shut off
  2. an explanation of the medical certificate rule
  3. availability of notices in languages other than English
  4. how to file an informal or formal complaints with both the utility company and the Commission
- utilities should ask new customers if they would like to have their notices in a language other than English.
- The rules should require the utilities to post these rights and responsibilities, in English and Spanish, in any office that customers visit.

## **Multilingual Notices**

We want utilities provide to information to customers in Arabic, Serbo-Croatian, Spanish, Russian and Vietnamese (or whatever languages the utility's customers speak).

## **Disconnect and reconnect fees**

What we want: a rule getting rid of disconnection fees and reconnection fees.

## **Payment Plans**

Right now, the rules says the utility can't shut you off if you can agree to pay a reasonable part of the bill and a way to pay off the rest. The utility has to consider the customer's ability to pay, the size of the unpaid balance, the customer's payment history, and the amount of time and reasons why the debt is outstanding.

The utilities are not accepting reasonable payment plan offers by our members. There are 2 possible solutions:

1. Finding a way to make the existing rule work, by getting the utilities, the PUC, and our members agree on what is reasonable and make sure that the utilities stick to it by making sure people know to call the PUC when they get turned down (maybe by making the utilities inform people of their rights when they turn down a payment plan or in the fine print on the back of the bill).
2. changing the rule to make it more specific. Other states have done that, for example:

- Alaska says you have to pay  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the bill and agree to pay off the rest you owe in 3-12 months.
- Indiana says you have to pay a reasonable amount but says it can't be more than \$10 or  $\frac{1}{10}$ <sup>th</sup> of the bill, and pay the rest off in 3 months
- Colorado says you have to pay off  $\frac{1}{10}$ <sup>th</sup> of the bill and agree to pay the rest off in a reasonable monthly installment plan