



Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

Your Residential Utility Consumer Advocate

CONSUMER FACT SHEET

Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

65 East State Street
7th Floor, Columbus, OH
43215

TWITTER:
@OCC4Consumers

E-MAIL:
occ@occ.ohio.gov

WEBSITE:
www.occ.ohio.gov

KEEP UTILITIES ON WITH A MEDICAL CERTIFICATION WAIVER

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

Ohio law and Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) rules prevent investor-owned utilities from disconnecting a consumer's electric, natural gas, and water 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. The medical certification can also apply under certain circumstances for maintaining services associated with the operation of medical or life-support equipment.

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, there should always be 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 upon request from the utility.

The certification form 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 professional will fax or mail the completed form to the utility company. The Medical Certification Waiver form can be accessed at <https://puco.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/puco/utilities/electricity/resources/30-day-medical-certificate>.

If a medical certification is received prior to 3:30 p.m., service will be restored the same day. 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.

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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.



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

The responsibility for determining whether a condition warrants a medical certification lies exclusively with the medical professional – not the utility. 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, contact your utility company directly, or the PUCO 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, natural gas, and/or water services, even for the period the medical certification was in effect. The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel recommends consumers contact the utility company to establish a payment plan for the unpaid account balance, which will become due after the medical certification waiver has expired.

Consumers with a medical condition who are experiencing difficulties paying their energy bills have options available to them other than a medical certification. For all customers, the PUCO requires utilities to offer extended payment plans. The annual Winter Reconnect Order, issued by the PUCO, is also available. For income eligible consumers, options include the Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP Plus), and the Winter Crisis Program. More information can be found at www.occ.ohio.gov.

Consumers who use a medical certification are still responsible for paying any missed payments to remain on PIPP Plus. Also, PIPP Plus customers do not receive incentive credits 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 uninterrupted service or immediate service 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.