

# Right to Utility and Deliverable Fuel Services

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## **Description:**

Utility companies and municipalities are limited in their ability to shut-off or deny utility services. Residential customers of gas and electric companies receive the highest level of consumer protection. For instance, low income and seriously ill consumers are protected from termination of gas and electric service during the winter moratorium, November 1 to May 1. Customers with life threatening conditions are protected year round. Service may not be shut off on a Friday, Saturday, Sunday, legal holiday, the day before a legal holiday or a day when the company's business office is either not open or is within one hour of closing or a complaint about the consumer's bill is being investigated.

Deliverable fuels, such as oil, propane, coal and wood, have fewer limitations on shut-offs or refusals to deliver services. There are usually competing deliverable fuel companies, however, that may provide services.

### *Security Deposits to Obtain Service:*

Connecticut Light & Power, United Illuminating, Yankee Gas, Southern Connecticut Gas, and Connecticut Natural Gas cannot deny service to hardship customers who are unable to pay a security deposit. Municipal utilities are allowed to charge security deposits, but the Connecticut Department of Social Services may help pay these deposits for persons receiving State Supplement or TFA.

## **Utility Service Terminations and Reinstatement:**

### *Life Threatening Service Terminations*

Gas and electric utility services may not be terminated, and must be reinstated if terminated, whenever a lack of such service would create a life-threatening situation, when the customer lacks the resources to pay the entire account and he/she has a registered physician's note.

### *Service Terminations Between November 1 and May 1*

Electric companies cannot terminate service to "hardship" customers from November 1 to May 1. Gas companies may not terminate "hardship" customers who use gas for heat; however, they can terminate service to "hardship" customers who do not use gas for heat. Hardship cases include customers who:

- Receive certain local, state or federal assistance.
- Receive income only from Social Security, Veteran's or Unemployment Compensation benefits.
- Have income that is less than 125 percent of the federal poverty level.
- Are unemployed with household incomes less than 300 percent of the federal poverty level.

- Have a seriously ill or life threatened household member.
- Have circumstances that threaten the deprivation of life necessities, such as food and shelter, if payment of a delinquent bill is made.

*Reinstatement of Service Between November 1 and May 1*

If electric service for a “hardship” customer is shut off before November 1, it must be reinstated on November 1, even if the customer has a balance on his/her account. Electric companies must reinstate services to hardship households without requiring any payment. Gas companies must reinstate service to hardship households unless service:

- Was shut off between April 16 and October 31, and
- Gas service was maintained the previous winter because of hardship, and
- The customer has not paid the least of: 20 percent of the balance owed when service was shut off, the minimum payment due under the customer’s payment plan, or \$100.

*Service Terminations Between May 2 and October 31*

Gas and electric services can be terminated for nonpayment of a bill between April 16 and October 31, except where the termination is life threatening. Service may be terminated during this time even if the customer is a “hardship” case.

*Payment Arrangements:*

All customers are entitled to work with utility companies to establish a reasonable payment agreement to maintain utility service. Such agreements let customers pay their utility debts over time to avoid either having service shut off or having to pay the bill in full before service is restored.

*Arrearage Forgiveness Programs:*

Connecticut’s gas and electric utility companies offer Arrearage Forgiveness Programs to help low-income customers with their utility bills. These programs establish payment arrangements that, allow customers to have a portion of their bills “forgiven” in exchange for making regular payments. At the end of the payment agreement, this “forgiveness” may result in a \$0 balance on a person’s bill, but it generally cannot result in a credit being posted on the account. For more information on these programs a person may contact the local Community Action Agency or the company from which the person receives his/her fuel.

It is best to contact utility companies before service is threatened to discuss the problem. However, if a written termination notice is received:

- The customer should try and make an affordable payment agreement
- If an affordable payment agreement cannot be made, ask that a “Company Review Officer” review the request for an affordable payment agreement and provide the customer with a written decision.

- If an agreement is still not made, request a written report of the case. Within five days of receiving the report the customer has the right to appeal to the Consumer Assistance and Information Unit (CA&I) of the Department of Public Utility Control. The CA&I Unit will attempt to work out an objective payment agreement.
- If the report provided by the Department of Public Utility Control does not resolve the problem, the consumer can file a written request for a hearing within ten days from when the report was mailed. This appeal process is not available to a customer who has not made payments that were agreed to in the preceding 12 months.

### *Energy Assistance and Fuel Banks*

Limited energy assistance may be applied for between November 1 and May 1. Fuel banks provide emergency assistance to state residents who do not qualify for government energy assistance. These banks annually disperse cash grants for eligible families that are paid directly to vendors to help pay winter heating bills.

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## **Eligibility Requirements, Service Areas and Program Year:**

Eligibility Requirements:

- Varies by the assistance provided.

Service Areas:

Statewide

Program Year:

N/A

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## **Contact Information:**

Connecticut Department of Public Utility Control  
10 Franklin Square  
New Britain, CT 06051  
Consumer Assistance Toll Free: 800-382-4586  
Cellular Complaints Toll Free: 866-381-2355  
Telephone: 860-827-1553  
Fax: 860-827-2885  
Website: [www.ct.gov/dpuc/](http://www.ct.gov/dpuc/)

To request the following booklets, call Statewide Legal Services at 860-344-0380 or 800-453-3320:

- How to Keep Year 'Round Utility Service
- Rights of Utility Customers
- Energy and Utility Problems with Landlords
- Energy Assistance Information

For information on and to contact a fuel bank call:

2-1-1 for local application sites.

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**Related Information:**

[Community Action Agencies, refer to page II – 10 and Appendix B for a list of towns each agency serves.](#)

[Connecticut Energy Assistance Program, refer to page XVII – 1.](#)

[Statewide Legal Services, refer to page XIV – 23.](#)