

## CHAPTER 25. SUBSTANTIVE RULES APPLICABLE TO ELECTRIC SERVICE PROVIDERS.

### Subchapter R. CUSTOMER PROTECTION RULES FOR RETAIL ELECTRIC SERVICE.

#### §25.483. Disconnection of Service.

- (a) **Disconnection and reconnection policy.** Only a transmission and distribution utility (TDU), municipally owned utility, or electric cooperative shall perform physical disconnections and reconnections. Unless otherwise stated, it is the responsibility of a retail electric provider (REP) to request such action from the appropriate TDU, municipally owned utility, or electric cooperative in accordance with that entity's relevant tariffs, in accordance with the protocols established by the registration agent, and in compliance with the requirements of this section. If a REP chooses to have a customer's electric service disconnected, it shall comply with the requirements in this section. Nothing in this section requires a REP to request that a customer's service be disconnected.
- (b) **Disconnection authority.**
- (1) Any REP may authorize the disconnection of a medium non-residential or large non-residential customer, as that term is defined in §25.43 of this title (relating to Provider of Last Resort (POLR)).
  - (2) Except as provided in subsection (d) of this section, all REPs shall have the authority to authorize the disconnection of residential and small non-residential customers pursuant to commission rules. Prior to authorizing disconnections for non-payment in accordance with this paragraph, a REP shall:
    - (A) test all necessary electronic transactions related to disconnections and reconnections of service; and
    - (B) file an affidavit from an officer of the company, in a project established by the commission for this purpose, affirming that the REP understands and has trained its personnel on the commission's rule requirements related to disconnection and reconnection, and has adequately tested the transactions described in subparagraph (A) of this paragraph.
- (c) **Disconnection with notice.** A REP having disconnection authority under the provisions of subsection (b) of this section, including the POLR, may authorize the disconnection of a customer's electric service after proper notice and not before the first day after the disconnection date in the notice for any of the following reasons:
- (1) failure to pay any outstanding bona fide debt for electric service owed to the REP or to make deferred payment arrangements by the date of disconnection stated on the disconnection notice. Payment of the delinquent bill at the REP's authorized payment agency is considered payment to the REP;
  - (2) failure to comply with the terms of a deferred payment agreement made with the REP;
  - (3) violation of the REP's terms and conditions on using service in a manner that interferes with the service of others or the operation of nonstandard equipment, if a reasonable attempt has been made to notify the customer and the customer is provided with a reasonable opportunity to remedy the situation;
  - (4) failure to pay a deposit as required by §25.478 of this title (relating to Credit Requirements and Deposits); or
  - (5) failure of the guarantor to pay the amount guaranteed, when the REP has a written agreement, signed by the guarantor, which allows for disconnection of the guarantor's service.
- (d) **Disconnection without prior notice.** Any REP or TDU may, at any time, authorize disconnection of a customer's electric service without prior notice for any of the following reasons:
- (1) Where a known dangerous condition exists for as long as the condition exists. Where reasonable, given the nature of the hazardous condition, the REP, or its agent, shall post a notice of disconnection and the reason for the disconnection at the place of common entry or upon the front door of each affected residential unit as soon as possible after service has been disconnected;

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- (2) Where service is connected without authority by a person who has not made application for service;
  - (3) Where service is reconnected without authority after disconnection for nonpayment;
  - (4) Where there has been tampering with the equipment of the transmission and distribution utility, municipally owned utility, or electric cooperative; or
  - (5) Where there is evidence of theft of service.
- (e) **Disconnection prohibited.** A REP having disconnection authority under the provisions of subsection (b) of this section shall not authorize a disconnection for nonpayment of a customer's electric service for any of the following reasons:
- (1) Delinquency in payment for electric service by a previous occupant of the premises;
  - (2) Failure to pay for any charge that is not for electric service regulated by the commission, including competitive energy service, merchandise, or optional services;
  - (3) Failure to pay for a different type or class of electric service unless charges for such service were included on that account's bill at the time service was initiated;
  - (4) Failure to pay charges resulting from an underbilling, except theft of service, more than six months prior to the current billing;
  - (5) Failure to pay disputed charges, except for the amount not under dispute, until a determination as to the accuracy of the charges has been made by the REP or the commission, and the customer has been notified of this determination;
  - (6) Failure to pay charges arising from an underbilling due to any faulty metering, unless the meter has been tampered with or unless such underbilling charges are due under §25.126 of this title (relating to Meter Tampering); or
  - (7) Failure to pay an estimated bill other than a bill rendered pursuant to an approved meter-reading plan, unless the bill is based on an estimated meter read by the TDU.
- (f) **Disconnection on holidays or weekends**
- (1) A REP having disconnection authority under the provisions of subsection (b) of this section shall not request disconnection of a customer's electric service for nonpayment on a holiday or weekend, or the day immediately preceding a holiday or weekend, unless the REP's personnel are available on those days to take payments, make payment arrangements with the customer, and request reconnection of service.
  - (2) Unless a dangerous condition exists or the customer requests disconnection, a TDU shall not disconnect a customer's electric service on a holiday or weekend, or the day immediately preceding a holiday or weekend, unless the personnel of the TDU are available to reconnect service on all of those days.
- (g) **Disconnection of ill and disabled.** A REP having disconnection authority under the provisions of subsection (b) of this section shall not authorize a disconnection for nonpayment of electric service at a permanent, individually metered dwelling unit of a delinquent customer when that customer establishes that disconnection of service will cause some person residing at that residence to become seriously ill or more seriously ill.
- (1) Each time a customer seeks to avoid disconnection of service under this subsection, the customer shall accomplish all of the following by the stated date of disconnection:
    - (A) Have the person's attending physician (for purposes of this subsection, the "physician" shall mean any public health official, including medical doctors, doctors of osteopathy, nurse practitioners, registered nurses, and any other similar public health official) call or contact the REP by the stated date of disconnection;
    - (B) Have the person's attending physician submit a written statement to the REP; and
    - (C) Enter into a deferred payment plan.

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- (2) The prohibition against service disconnection provided by this subsection shall last 63 days from the issuance of the bill for electric service or a shorter period agreed upon by the REP and the customer or physician.
  - (3) If, in the normal performance of its duties, a TDU obtains information that a customer scheduled for disconnection may qualify for delay of disconnection pursuant to this subsection, and the TDU reasonably believes that the information may be unknown to the REP, the TDU shall delay the disconnection and promptly communicate the information to the REP. The TDU shall disconnect such customer if it subsequently receives a confirmation of the disconnect notice from the REP. Nothing herein should be interpreted as requiring a TDU to assess or to inquire as to the customer's status before performing a disconnection, or to provide prior notice of the disconnection, when not otherwise required.
- (h) **Disconnection of energy assistance clients.**
- (1) A REP having disconnection authority under the provisions of subsection (b) of this section shall not authorize a disconnection for nonpayment of electric service to a delinquent residential customer for a billing period in which the REP receives a pledge, letter of intent, purchase order, or other notification that the energy assistance provider is forwarding sufficient payment to continue service provided that such pledge, letter of intent, purchase order, or other notification is received by the due date stated on the disconnection notice, and the customer, by the due date on the disconnection notice, either pays or makes payment arrangements to pay any outstanding debt not covered by the energy assistance provider.
  - (2) If an energy assistance provider has requested monthly usage data pursuant to §25.472(b)(4) of this title (relating to Privacy of Customer Information), the REP shall extend the final due date on the disconnection notice, day for day, from the date the usage data was requested until it is provided.
  - (3) A REP shall allow at least 45 days for an energy assistance provider to honor a pledge, letter of intent, purchase order, or other notification before submitting the disconnection request to the TDU.
  - (4) A REP may request disconnection of service to a customer if payment from the energy assistance provider's pledge is not received within the time frame agreed to by the REP and the energy assistance provider, or if the customer fails to pay any portion of the outstanding balance not covered by the pledge.
- (i) **Disconnection during extreme weather.** A REP having disconnection authority under the provisions of subsection (b) of this section shall not authorize a disconnection for nonpayment of electric service for any customer in a county in which an extreme weather emergency occurs. A REP shall offer residential customers a deferred payment plan upon request by the customer that complies with the requirements of §25.480 of this title (relating to Bill Payment and Adjustments) for bills that become due during the weather emergency.
- (1) The term "extreme weather emergency" shall mean a day when:
    - (A) the previous day's highest temperature did not exceed 32 degrees Fahrenheit, and the temperature is predicted to remain at or below that level for the next 24 hours anywhere in the county, according to the nearest National Weather Service (NWS) reports; or
    - (B) the NWS issues a heat advisory for a county, or when such advisory has been issued on any one of the preceding two calendar days in a county.
  - (2) A TDU shall notify the commission of an extreme weather emergency in a method prescribed by the commission, on each day that the TDU has determined that an extreme weather emergency has been issued for a county in its service area. The initial notice shall include the county in which the extreme weather emergency occurred and the name and telephone number of the utility contact person.

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- (j) **Disconnection of master-metered apartments.** When a bill for electric service is delinquent for a master-metered apartment complex:
- (1) The REP having disconnection authority under the provisions of subsection (b) of this section shall send a notice to the customer as required by subsection (k) of this section. At the time such notice is issued, the REP, or its agents, shall also inform the customer that notice of possible disconnection will be provided to the tenants of the apartment complex in six days if payment is not made before that time.
  - (2) At least six days after providing notice to the customer and at least four days before disconnecting, the REP shall post a minimum of five notices in English and Spanish in conspicuous areas in the corridors or other public places of the apartment complex. Language in the notice shall be in large type and shall read: "Notice to residents of (name and address of apartment complex): Electric service to this apartment complex is scheduled for disconnection on (date), because (reason for disconnection)."
- (k) **Disconnection notices.** A disconnection notice for nonpayment shall:
- (1) not be issued before the first day after the bill is due;
  - (2) be a separate mailing or hand delivered notice with a stated date of disconnection with the words "disconnection notice" or similar language prominently displayed. The REP may send the disconnection notice concurrently with the request for a deposit;
  - (3) have a disconnection date that is not a holiday, weekend day, or day that the REP's personnel are not available to take payments, and is not less than ten days after the notice is issued; and
  - (4) include a statement notifying the customer that if the customer needs assistance paying the bill by the due date, or is ill and unable to pay the bill, the customer may be able to make some alternate payment arrangement, establish a deferred payment plan, or possibly secure payment assistance. The notice shall also advise the customer to contact the provider for more information.
- (l) **Contents of disconnection notice.** Any disconnection notice shall include the following information:
- (1) The reason for disconnection;
  - (2) The actions, if any, that the customer may take to avoid disconnection of service;
  - (3) The amount of all fees or charges which will be assessed against the customer as a result of the default;
  - (4) The amount overdue;
  - (5) A toll-free telephone number that the customer can use to contact the REP to discuss the notice of disconnection or to file a complaint with the REP, and the following statement: "If you are not satisfied with our response to your inquiry or complaint, you may file a complaint by calling or writing the Public Utility Commission of Texas, P.O. Box 13326, Austin, Texas, 78711-3326; Telephone: (512) 936-7120 or toll-free in Texas at (888) 782-8477. Hearing and speech impaired individuals with text telephones (TTY) may contact the commission at (512) 936-7136. Complaints may also be filed electronically at [www.puc.state.tx.us/ocp/complaints/complain.cfm](http://www.puc.state.tx.us/ocp/complaints/complain.cfm);"
  - (6) If a deposit is being held by the REP on behalf of the customer, a statement that the deposit will be applied against the final bill (if applicable) and the remaining deposit will be either returned to the customer or transferred to the new REP, at the customer's designation and with the consent of both REPs;
  - (7) The availability of deferred payment or other billing arrangements, from the REP, and the availability of any state or federal energy assistance programs and information on how to get further information about those programs; and
  - (8) A description of the activities that the REP will use to collect payment, including the use of consumer reporting agencies, debt collection agencies, small claims court, and other remedies allowed by law, if the customer does not pay or make acceptable payment arrangements with the REP.

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- (m) **Reconnection of service.** Upon a customer's satisfactory correction of the reasons for disconnection, the REP shall request the TDU, municipally owned utility, or electric cooperative to reconnect the customer's electric service as quickly as possible. The REP shall inform the customer of the approximate reconnection time in accordance with this subsection. If a REP submits a reconnection order with no priority or same day reconnect request and the TDU completes the reconnect the same day, the TDU shall not assess a priority reconnect fee. A TDU may assess a priority reconnect fee only when the customer expressly requests it. A customer's service shall be reconnected no later than the timelines set forth below:
- (1) For payments made between 8:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m. on a business day, a REP shall send a reconnection request to the TDU no later than 2:00 p.m. on the same day. The TDU shall reconnect service to that customer that day if possible, but no later than the end of the next utility field operational day after the reconnection request was received by the TDU.
  - (2) For payments made after 12:00 p.m., but before 5:00 p.m. on a business day, a REP shall send a reconnection request to the TDU by 7:00 p.m. on the same day. The TDU shall reconnect service to that customer the next day if possible, but no later than the end of the next utility field operational day after the reconnection request was received by the TDU.
  - (3) For payments made after 5:00 p.m., but before 7:00 p.m. on a business day, a REP shall send a reconnection request to the TDU by 9:00 p.m. The TDU shall reconnect service to that customer as soon as possible, but no later than the end of the next utility field operational day after the reconnection request was received by the TDU.
  - (4) For payments made after 7:00 p.m., but before 8:00 a.m. on the next business day, a REP shall send a reconnection request to the TDU by 2:00 p.m. on the next business day. The TDU shall reconnect service to that customer no later than the end of the next utility field operational day after the reconnection request was received by the TDU.
  - (5) For payments made on a weekend day or a holiday, a REP shall send a reconnection request to the TDU by 2:00 p.m. on the first business day after the payment was made. The TDU shall reconnect service to that customer no later than the end of the next utility field operational day after the reconnection request was received by the TDU.
  - (6) In no event shall a REP fail to send a reconnection notice within 48 hours after the customer's satisfactory correction of the reasons for disconnection as specified in the disconnection notice.
  - (7) In no event shall a TDU fail to reconnect service within 48 hours after a reconnection request is received.