

199—21.12(476) Customer relations for sanitary sewage disposal service.**21.12(1) Customer information.***a. Each utility shall:*

(1) Post a notice in a conspicuous place in each office of the utility where applications for service are received, informing the public that copies of the rates and rules relating to the service of the utility are available for public inspection. This notice will also be provided on the utility's website and supplied to the customer with service applications.

(2) Maintain up-to-date maps, plans, or records of its entire system.

(3) Upon request, assist the customer or prospective customers in selecting the most economic rate schedule available for the proposed type of service.

(4) Upon request, inform the customer as to the method of reading meters and the method of computing the customer's bill.

(5) Notify customers affected by a change in rates or rate classification as directed in the commission's rules.

b. Inquiries for information or complaints to a utility will be resolved promptly and courteously. Employees who receive customer telephone calls and office visits shall be qualified and trained in screening and resolving complaints to avoid a preliminary recitation of the entire complaint to employees without ability and authority to act. The employee will provide identification to the customer, which will enable the customer to reach that employee again if needed.

c. Each utility shall notify its customers, by bill insert or notice on the bill form, of the address and telephone number where a utility representative qualified to assist in resolving the complaint can be reached. The utility will also include the following statement: "If (utility name) does not resolve your complaint, you may request assistance from the Iowa Utilities Commission by calling 877.565.4450; by writing to 1375 E. Court Ave., Des Moines, IA 50319; or by email to customer@iuc.iowa.gov." This information will be provided no less than annually.

d. Any utility that does not use the standard form contained herein will file its proposed form in its tariff for approval. A utility that bills by postcard may place an advertisement in a local newspaper of general circulation or a customer newsletter instead of a mailing, as long as the advertisement is of a type size that is easily legible and conspicuous and contains the information set forth above.

21.12(2) Customer deposits.

a. Deposit required. Each utility may require from any customer or prospective customer a deposit intended to guarantee payment of bills for service.

b. Amount of deposit. The total deposit will not be less than \$5 nor more in amount than the maximum estimated charge for service for 90 days or as may reasonably be required by the utility in cases involving service for short periods or special occasions.

c. New or additional deposit. A new or additional deposit may be required from a customer when a deposit has been refunded or is found to be inadequate. Written notice is to be mailed advising the customer of any new or additional deposit requirement. The customer will have no less than 12 days from the date of mailing to comply. The utility does not need to provide written notice of a deposit required as a prerequisite for commencing initial service.

d. Customer's deposit receipt. The utility will issue a receipt of deposit to each customer from whom a deposit is received.

e. Interest on customer deposits. Interest will be paid by the utility to each customer required to make a deposit. Utilities will compute interest on customer deposits at 7.5 percent per annum, compounded annually. Interest for prior periods will be computed at the rate specified by the rule in effect for the period in question. Interest will be paid for the period beginning with the date of deposit to the date of refund or to the date that the deposit is applied to the customer's account, or to the date the customer's bill becomes permanently delinquent. The date of refund is that date on which the refund or the notice of deposit refund is forwarded to the customer's last-known address. The date a customer's bill becomes permanently delinquent is the most recent date the account is treated as uncollectible.

f. Deposit refund. The deposit shall be refunded after 12 consecutive months of prompt payment unless the utility has evidence to indicate that the deposit is necessary to ensure payment of bills for service. In any event, the deposit will be refunded upon termination of the customer's service.

g. Unclaimed deposits. The utility will make a reasonable effort to return each unclaimed deposit and accrued interest after the termination of the services for which the deposit was made. The utility will maintain a record of deposit information for at least two years or until such time as the deposit, together with accrued interest, escheats to the state pursuant to Iowa Code section 556.4, at which time the record and deposit, together with accrued interest, less any lawful deductions, will be sent to the state treasurer pursuant to Iowa Code section 556.13.

21.12(3) Customer bill forms. The utility will bill each customer as promptly as possible following the reading of the customer's meter. Each bill, including the customer's receipt, shall show:

a. The date and the reading of the meter at the beginning and at the end of the period or the period for which the bill is rendered.

b. The number of units metered, when applicable.

c. Identification of the applicable rates.

d. The gross and net amounts of the bill.

e. The late payment charge and the latest date on which the bill may be paid without incurring a penalty.

f. A distinct marking to identify an estimated bill, when applicable.

21.12(4) Bill payment terms. The bill is considered rendered to the customer when deposited in the U.S. mail with postage prepaid, or sent via electronic delivery with customer consent. If delivery is by other than U.S. mail, the bill is considered rendered when delivered to the last-known address, including electronic addresses, of the party responsible for payment. The customer will have a minimum of 20 days between the rendering of a bill and the date by which the account becomes delinquent.

a. Late payment charge. A utility's late payment charge will not exceed 1.5 percent per month of the past due amount.

b. Charge forgiveness. Each account will be granted at least one complete forgiveness of a late payment charge each calendar year. The utility's rules will be definitive that on one monthly bill in each period of eligibility, the utility will accept the net amount of such bill as full payment for such month after expiration of the net payment period. The rules shall state how the customer is notified that the eligibility has been used.

When a residential customer cannot pay in full a delinquent bill for utility service or has an outstanding debt to the utility for residential utility service and is not in default of a payment agreement with the utility, a utility shall offer the customer an opportunity to enter into a reasonable payment agreement, as defined in subrule 21.4(12).

21.12(5) Customer records. The utility shall retain customer billing records for the length of time necessary to permit the utility to comply with subrule 21.12(6), but not less than three years.

21.12(6) Adjustment of bills. Bills that are incorrect due to meter or billing errors are to be adjusted as follows:

a. Fast meters. Whenever a meter in service is tested and found to have overregistered more than 2 percent, the utility shall adjust the customer's bill for the excess amount paid. The estimated amount of overcharge is to be based on the period the error first developed or occurred. If that period cannot be definitely determined, it will be assumed that the overregistration existed for a period equal to one-half the time since the meter was last tested, or one-half the time since the meter was installed unless otherwise ordered by the commission. If the recalculated bill indicates that more than \$5 is due an existing customer, the full amount of the calculated difference between the amount paid and the recalculated amount shall be refunded to the customer. If a refund is due a person no longer a customer of the utility, a notice will be mailed to the last-known address.

b. Nonregistering meters. Whenever a meter in service is found not to register, the utility may render an estimated bill.

c. Slow meters. Whenever a meter is found to be more than 2 percent slow, the utility may bill the customer for the amount the test indicates the customer has been undercharged for the period of inaccuracy, or a period as estimated in paragraph 21.12(6) “a” unless otherwise ordered by the commission.

d. Overcharges. When a customer has been overcharged as a result of incorrect reading of the meter, incorrect application of the rate schedule, incorrect connection of the metering installation, or other similar reasons, the amount of the overcharge shall be adjusted, refunded, or credited to the customer. The time period for which the utility is required to adjust, refund, or credit the customer’s bill cannot exceed five years unless otherwise ordered by the commission.

e. Undercharges. When a customer has been undercharged as a result of incorrect reading of the meter, incorrect application of the rate schedule, incorrect connection of the metering installation, or other similar reasons, the tariff may provide for billing the amount of the undercharge to the customer. The time period for which the utility may adjust for the undercharge need not exceed five years unless otherwise ordered by the commission. The maximum bill will not exceed the billing for like charges (e.g., usage-based, fixed, or service charges) in the 12 months preceding discovery of the error unless otherwise ordered by the commission.

21.12(7) Refusal of service. Service may be refused only for the reasons listed in paragraphs 21.12(7) “a” through “e” below. Unless otherwise stated, the customer shall be permitted at least 12 days, excluding Sundays and legal holidays, following mailing of notice of refusal in which to take necessary action before service is refused. When a person is refused service, the utility shall notify the person promptly of the reason for the refusal to serve and of the person’s right to file a complaint about the utility’s decision with the commission. Refusal of service shall be pursuant to tariffs approved by the commission.

a. Without notice in the event of an emergency.

b. Without notice in the event of tampering with the equipment furnished and owned by the utility or obtaining service by fraudulent means.

c. For violation of or noncompliance with the utility’s rules on file with the commission.

d. For failure of the customer to permit the utility reasonable access to its equipment.

e. For nonpayment of bill.

21.12(8) Method of refusing service. A utility may refuse sanitary sewage disposal service to a residential customer by disconnecting water service or by arranging for the disconnection of water service pursuant to an agreement with the entity providing water service. Except in the event of an emergency or with prior written authorization from the commission, a utility shall not refuse sanitary sewage disposal service to a residential customer by physically disconnecting the customer’s sanitary sewage service connection.

21.12(9) Reconnection and charges. In all cases of discontinuance of sanitary sewage disposal service where the cause of discontinuance has been corrected, the utility will promptly restore service to the customer. The utility may make a reasonable charge applied uniformly for reconnection of service.

21.12(10) Insufficient reasons for denying service. The following does not constitute sufficient cause for refusal of service to a present or prospective customer:

a. Delinquency in payment for service by a previous occupant of the premises to be served.

b. Failure to pay the bill of another customer as guarantor thereof.

c. Failure to pay for a different type or class of utility service.

d. Delinquency in payment for service arising more than ten years prior, as measured from the most recent of the last date of service, the physical disconnection of service, or the last payment or promise of payment made by the customer.

21.12(11) Customer complaints. “Complaint” means any objection to the charge, facilities, or quality of service of a utility.

a. Each utility will investigate promptly and thoroughly and keep a record of all complaints received from its customers that will enable the utility to review its procedures and actions. The record shall show the name and address of the complainant, the date and nature of the complaint, and the complaint’s disposition and the date resolved.

b. All complaints caused by a major service interruption shall be summarized in a single report.

c. A record of the original complaint shall be kept for a period of three years after final resolution of the complaint.

21.12(12) *Reasonable payment agreement.* A customer may enter into a reasonable payment agreement as defined in subrule 21.4(12).

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