**199—28.4(476) Disconnection of service.**

**28.4(1)** *Disconnection procedures and notice.* Utilities may only disconnect service to customers in compliance with the following procedure and requirements:

*a.* Service may be disconnected without notice:

(1) In the event of a condition on the customer's premises determined by the utility to be hazardous.

(2) In the event of customer use of equipment in a manner that adversely affects the utility's equipment or the utility's service to others.

(3) In the event of tampering with the equipment furnished and owned by the utility. A broken or absent meter seal alone does not constitute tampering.

(4) In the event of unauthorized use.

*b.* The utility shall give written notice of pending disconnection, except as specified in paragraph 28.4(1)*"a."* The notice will include the reason for the notice and the final date by which the account is to be settled or specific action taken. The notice is to be addressed to the customer's last-known address and deposited in the U.S. mail with postage prepaid. If delivery is by other than U.S. mail, the notice is to be delivered to the last-known address of the customer or sent via electronic delivery with customer consent. Such consent shall be deemed given when the customer consents to or requests electronic billing. The date for disconnection of service is not to be less than 12 days after the notice is provided. The date for disconnection of service for customers on shorter billing intervals is not to be less than 24 hours after the notice is posted at the service premises.

*c.* Where more than one cause of disconnection exists, one written notice is to be given that includes all reasons for the notice. In determining the final date by which the account is to be settled or other specific action taken, the days of notice for the causes run concurrently.

*d.* Service may be disconnected after proper notice:

(1) For violation of or noncompliance with the utility's rules.

(2) For failure of the customer to furnish the service equipment, permits, certificates, or rights-of-way that are specified to be furnished, in the utility's rules filed with the commission, as conditions of obtaining service; for the withdrawal of that same equipment; for the termination of those same permissions or rights; or for the failure of the customer to fulfill the contractual obligations imposed as conditions of obtaining service by any contract filed with and subject to the regulatory authority of the commission.

(3) For failure of the customer to permit the utility reasonable access to the utility's equipment.

*e.* Service may be disconnected after proper notice for nonpayment of a bill or deposit, provided that the utility has complied with the following provisions:

(1) Given the customer a reasonable opportunity to dispute the reason for the disconnection or refusal.

(2) Given the customer, and any other person or agency designated by the customer, written notice that the customer has at least 12 days in which to make settlement of the account to avoid disconnection and a written summary of the rights and responsibilities set out in subrule 28.4(2). Customers billed more frequently than monthly are to be given posted written notice that they have 24 hours to make settlement of the account to avoid disconnection and a written summary of the rights and responsibilities. All written notices include a toll-free or collect telephone number where a utility representative qualified to provide additional information about the disconnection can be reached. Each utility representative provides the representative's name and has immediate access to current, detailed information concerning the customer's account and previous contacts with the utility.

(3) When disconnecting service to a residence, a diligent attempt is to be made to contact, by telephone or in person, the customer to inform the customer of the pending disconnection and the customer's rights and responsibilities. Between November 1 and April 1, if the attempt at customer contact fails, the premises are to be posted, at least one day prior to disconnection, with a notice informing the customer of the pending disconnection and a copy of the rights and responsibilities available to avoid disconnection.

1. If an attempt at personal or telephone contact of a customer occupying a rental unit has been unsuccessful, the utility is to make a diligent attempt to contact the landlord of the rental unit, if known, to determine if the customer is still in occupancy and, if so, the customer's present location. The landlord is

to be informed of the date when service may be disconnected. The utility will make a diligent attempt to inform the landlord at least 48 hours prior to disconnection of service to a tenant.

2. If the disconnection will affect occupants of residential units leased from the customer, the premises of any building known by the utility to contain residential units affected by disconnection are to be posted at least two days prior to disconnection, with a notice informing any occupants of the date when service will be disconnected and the reasons for the disconnection.

3. If the customer has received notice of disconnection and has a dispute concerning a bill for gas service, the gas utility may require the customer to pay a sum of money equal to the amount of the undisputed portion of the bill pending settlement and thereby avoid disconnection of service. Disconnection for nonpayment of the disputed bill is delayed for up to 45 days after the providing of the bill if the customer pays the undisputed amount. The 45 days may be extended by up to 60 days if requested of the utility by the commission in the event the customer files a written complaint with the commission in compliance with 199—Chapter 6.

*f.* Disconnection and reconnection. Disconnection of a residential customer may take place only between the hours of 6 a.m. and 2 p.m. on a weekday and not on weekends or holidays. If a disconnected customer makes payment or other arrangements during normal business hours, or by 7 p.m. for utilities permitting such payment or other arrangements after normal business hours, all reasonable efforts are to be made to reconnect the customer that day. If a disconnected customer makes payment or other arrangements after 7 p.m., all reasonable efforts are to be made to reconnect the customer not later than 11 a.m. the next day.

*g.* Severe cold weather. A disconnection is not to take place where gas is used as the only source of space heating or to control or operate the only space heating equipment at a residence when the actual temperature or the 24-hour forecast of the National Weather Service for the residence's area is predicted to be 20 degrees Fahrenheit or colder. If the utility has properly posted a disconnect notice but is precluded from disconnecting service because of severe cold weather, the utility may immediately proceed with appropriate disconnection procedures, without further notice, when the temperature in the residence's area rises above 20 degrees Fahrenheit and is forecasted to remain above 20 degrees Fahrenheit for at least 24 hours unless the customer has paid in full the past due amount or is otherwise entitled to postponement of disconnection.

*h.* Medical stay. Disconnection of a residential customer will be postponed if the disconnection of service would present an especial danger to the health of any permanent resident of the premises.

(1) An especial danger to health is indicated if a person appears to be seriously impaired and may, because of mental or physical problems, be unable to manage the person's own resources, to carry out activities of daily living or to be protected from neglect or hazardous situations without assistance from others. Indicators of an especial danger to health include but are not limited to age, infirmity, or mental incapacitation; serious illness; physical disability, including blindness and limited mobility; and any other factual circumstances that indicate a severe or hazardous health situation.

(2) The utility may require written verification of the especial danger to health by a physician or a public health official, including the name of the person endangered; a statement that the person is a resident of the premises in question; the name, business address, and telephone number of the certifying party; the nature of the health danger; and approximately how long the danger will continue. Initial verification by the verifying party may be by telephone if written verification is forwarded to the utility within five days.

(3) Verification will postpone disconnection for 30 days. In the event service is terminated within 14 days prior to verification of illness by or for a qualifying resident, service is to be restored to that residence if a proper verification is thereafter made in accordance with the foregoing provisions. If the customer does not enter into a reasonable payment agreement for the retirement of the unpaid balance of the account within the first 30 days and does not keep the current account paid during the period that the unpaid balance is to be retired, the customer is subject to disconnection.

*i.* Winter energy assistance. If between November 1 through April 1 the utility is informed that the customer's household may qualify for winter energy assistance or weatherization funds, service is not to be disconnected for 30 days from the date the utility is notified to allow the customer time to obtain assistance. Disconnection of service is not allowed from November 1 through April 1 for a resident who is a head of

household and who has been certified to the utility by the community action agency as eligible for either the low-income home energy assistance program or the weatherization assistance program.

*j.* Deployment. If the utility is informed that one of the heads of household, as defined in Iowa Code section 476.20, is a service member deployed for military service, as defined in Iowa Code section 29A.90, disconnection cannot take place at the residence during the deployment or prior to 90 days after the end of the deployment.

*k.* Abnormal gas consumption. A customer who is subject to disconnection for nonpayment of bill, and who has gas consumption that appears to the customer to be abnormally high, may request the utility provide assistance in identifying the factors contributing to this usage pattern and to suggest remedial measures. Assistance will be provided by the utility by discussing patterns of gas usage that may be readily identifiable, suggesting that an energy audit be conducted, and identifying sources of energy conservation information and financial assistance available to the customer.

*l.* A utility may disconnect gas service after 24-hour notice (and without the written 12-day notice) for failure of the customer to comply with the terms of a payment agreement.

*m.* Prior to November 1, a notice describing the availability of winter energy assistance funds and the application process is to be mailed to customers. The notice is to be of a type size that is easily legible and conspicuous and contain the information set out by the state agency administering the assistance program. A utility serving fewer than 25,000 customers may publish the notice in a customer newsletter in lieu of mailing. A serving fewer than 6,000 customers may publish the notice in an advertisement in a local newspaper of general circulation or shopper's guide.

**28.4(2)** *Notice of customer rights and responsibilities.* The standard form of the summary of the rights and responsibilities to be provided to customers is set out below and will be provided by a utility with all disconnection notices. A nonstandard rights and responsibilities notice may be used with commission approval. The standard customer rights and responsibilities notice is as follows:

**CUSTOMER RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES TO AVOID SHUTOFF OF GAS SERVICE FOR NONPAYMENT**

**1. What can I do if I receive a notice from the utility that says my service will be shut off because I have a past due bill?**

a. Pay the bill in full;

b. Enter into a reasonable payment plan with the utility (see #2 below);

c. Apply for and become eligible for low-income energy assistance (see #3 below);

d. Give the utility a written statement from a doctor or public health official stating that shutting off your gas service would pose an especial health danger for a person living at the residence (see #4 below); or

e. Tell the utility if you think part of the amount shown on the bill is wrong. However, you must still pay the part of the bill you agree you owe the utility (see #5 below).

**2. How do I go about making a reasonable payment plan? (Residential customers only)**

a. Contact the utility as soon as you know you cannot pay the amount you owe. If you cannot pay all the money you owe at one time, you are to be offered a payment plan that spreads payments evenly over at least 12 months. The plan may be longer depending on your financial situation.

b. If you have not made the payments you promised in a previous payment plan with the utility and still owe money, you may qualify for a second payment agreement under certain conditions.

c. If you do not make the payments you promise, the utility may shut off your gas service on one day's notice, unless all the money you owe the utility is paid or you enter into another payment agreement.

**3. How do I apply for low-income energy assistance? (Residential customers only)**

a. Applications are taken at your local community action agency. If you are unsure where to apply, call 211 or 800.244.7431, or visit hhs.iowa.gov/programs/programs-and-services/liheap. To prevent disconnection, contact the utility prior to disconnection of your service.

b. To avoid disconnection, you must apply for energy assistance or weatherization before your service is shut off. Notify your utility that you may be eligible and have applied for energy assistance. Once your service has been disconnected, it will not be reconnected based on approval for energy assistance.

c. Being certified eligible for energy assistance will prevent your service from being disconnected from November 1 through April 1. Between November 1 and April 1, the utility will delay disconnection of your service for 30 days once you notify the utility that you are applying for energy assistance or weatherization assistance, to allow you time to obtain assistance. Only one 30-day delay is required during the moratorium period.

**4. What if someone living at the residence has a serious health condition? (Residential customers only)**

Contact the utility if you believe this is the case. Contact your doctor or a public health official and ask the doctor or health official to contact the utility and state that shutting off your gas service would pose an especial health danger for a person living at your residence. The doctor or public health official must provide a written statement to the utility's office within five days of when your doctor or public health official notifies the utility of the health condition; otherwise, your gas service may be shut off. If the utility receives this written statement, your service will not be shut off for 30 days. This 30-day delay is to allow you time to arrange payment of your utility bill or find other living arrangements. After 30 days, your service may be shut off if payment arrangements have not been made.

**5. What should I do if I believe my bill is not correct?**

You may dispute your bill by telling the utility that you dispute the bill and paying the part of the bill you think is correct. If you do this, the utility will not shut off your service for 45 days from the date the bill was mailed while you and the utility work out the dispute over the part of the bill you think is incorrect. You may ask the Iowa Utilities Commission for assistance in resolving the dispute (see #9 below).

**6. When can the utility shut off my gas service because I have not paid my bill?**

a. Your utility can shut off service between the hours of 6 a.m. and 2 p.m. Monday through Friday.

b. The utility will not shut off your service on nights, weekends, or holidays for nonpayment of a bill.

c. The utility will not shut off your service if you enter into a reasonable payment plan to pay the overdue amount (see #2 above).

d. The utility will not shut off your service if the temperature is forecasted to be 20 degrees Fahrenheit or colder during the following 24-hour period, including the day your service is scheduled to be shut off.

e. If you have qualified for low-income energy assistance, the utility cannot shut off your service from November 1 through April 1. However, you will still owe the utility for the service used during this time.

f. The utility will not shut off your service if you have notified the utility that you dispute a portion of your bill and you pay the part of the bill that you agree is correct.

g. If one of the heads of household is a service member deployed for military service, gas service cannot be shut off during the deployment or within 90 days after the end of deployment. In order for this exception to disconnection to apply, the utility will need to be informed of the deployment prior to disconnection. However, you will still owe the utility for service used during this time.

**7. How will I be told the utility is going to shut off my service?**

a. You must be given a written notice at least 12 days before the gas service can be shut off for nonpayment. This notice will include the reason for shutting off your service.

b. If you have not made payments required by an agreed-upon payment plan, your service may be disconnected with only one day's notice.

c. The utility must try to reach you by telephone or in person before it shuts off your service. From November 1 through April 1, if the utility cannot reach you by telephone or in person, the utility will put a written notice on the door of or another conspicuous place at your residence to tell you that your gas service will be shut off.

**8. If service is shut off, when will it be turned back on?**

a. The utility will turn your service back on if you pay the whole amount you owe. The service shall be restored for 30 days if you provide the utility with a medical verification from a doctor or public health official of an especial danger to health within 14 days of a shutoff for nonpayment.

b. If you make your payment during regular business hours, or by 7 p.m. for utilities permitting such payment or other arrangements after regular business hours, the utility must make a reasonable effort to turn your service back on that day. If service cannot reasonably be turned on that same day, the utility is to do it by 11 a.m. the next day.

c. The utility may charge you a fee to turn your service back on. That fee may be higher in the evening or on weekends, so you may ask that your service be turned on during normal utility business hours.

**9. Is there any other help available besides my utility?**

If the utility has not been able to help you with your problem, you may contact the Iowa Utilities Commission toll-free at 877.565.4450. You may also write the Iowa Utilities Commission at 1375 E. Court Ave., Des Moines, IA 50319-0069, or email customer@iuc.iowa.gov. Low-income customers may also be eligible for free legal assistance from Iowa Legal Aid and may contact Iowa Legal Aid at 800.532.1275.

**28.4(3)** *When disconnection is not allowed.*

*a.* No disconnection may take place from November 1 through April 1 for a resident who has been certified to the utility by the local community action agency as being eligible for either the low-income home energy assistance program or weatherization assistance program.

*b.* If the utility is informed that one of the heads of household, as defined in Iowa Code section 476.20, is a service member deployed for military service, as defined in Iowa Code section 29A.90, disconnection cannot take place at the residence during the deployment or prior to 90 days after the end of the deployment.

**28.4(4)** *Servicing of utilization control equipment.* Each utility is to service and maintain any equipment it uses on a customer's premises and correctly set and keep in proper adjustment any utility-owned thermostats, clocks, relays, time switches, or other devices that control the customer's service in accordance with the provisions in the utility's schedules.

**28.4(5)** *Customer complaints.* A utility will promptly and thoroughly investigate all complaints concerning its practices, facilities, or services. The utility is to keep such records of customer complaints as will enable it to review and analyze its procedures and actions.

*a.* Each utility is to develop a fully informative procedure for the resolution of customer complaints.

*b.* The utility is to take reasonable steps to ensure that customers unable to travel are not denied the right to be heard.

*c.* The final step in a complaint review procedure, if the utility and customer are not able to agree on a resolution of the complaint, is a filing for commission resolution of the issues if the commission determines it has jurisdiction.

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