



CITY OF ROHNERT PARK UTILITY BILLING POLICY

SUBJECT/TITLE:	POLICY NO:	APPROVAL DATE:
DISCONTINUATION OF RESIDENTIAL SERVICE FOR NONPAYMENT POLICY		2/1/2020

PURPOSE

This policy enumerates City of Rohnert Park Utility's administrative actions for the collection of delinquent accounts, including notifications, fee assignments and discontinuation of service. This policy will be made available to the public on the City's website. The Utility department can be contacted by phone at (707) 585-6750 to discuss options for averting discontinuation of water service for nonpayment under the terms of this policy.

POLICY

Past Due Account:

Bills for utility service to all accounts are due and become delinquent 21 days after presentation:

1. Small Balance Accounts:

Any balance on a bill of \$20 or less may be carried over, and added to, the next billing period without being assessed a late fee or incurring further collection action.

2. Late Fee:

A penalty fee will be assessed on unpaid balances no sooner than twenty-one days after the bill has been presented to the customer. The due date and late fee will be displayed prominently on the notice of delinquency.

3. Waiver of Late Fee:

At the request of the customer, the City will waive the late fee if there are extenuating circumstances and the customer has not had a late fee for delinquent payment waived in the preceding 12 months.

4. Written Disconnection Notice:

A. The City shall not discontinue water service for non-payment until payment by the customer has been delinquent for at least 60 days.

B. Customer Notices: The City will mail a notice in writing at least 7 business days before discontinuation of water service for non-payment. The written notice will be mailed to the mailing address designated on the account. If the mailing address and the address of the property to which water service is provided are different, a second notice will also be mailed to the service address and addressed to "Occupant". The written disconnection notice will include:

- Customer's name and address
- Amount that is past due
- Date by which payment or payment arrangements are required to avoid discontinuation of service
- Description of the process to apply for an amortization plan
- Description of the process to dispute or appeal a bill



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- City Utility phone number and a web link to this policy and all other City policies on collection of delinquent accounts and reconnection of service.

c. Resident Notices for Accounts Held By Landlord: In addition to customer notices under paragraph B, if the property is individually metered residential service to residential occupants of a detached single-family dwelling, a multiunit residential structure, mobile home park, or permanent residential structure in a labor camp, and the owner, manager, or operator of the dwelling, structure, or park is the customer of record, the City shall make every good faith effort to inform the residential occupants, by means of written notice, when the account is in arrears that service will be terminated at least 10 days prior to the termination. The written notice shall further inform the residential occupants that they have the right to become customers, to whom the service will then be billed, without being required to pay any amount which may be due on the delinquent account.

5. Telephone Contact :

In addition to the above written notice, the City will make a reasonable, good faith effort to notify the customer by phone at least 48 hours in advance of disconnection of water service for non-payment. City staff shall offer to discuss any options to avert discontinuation of residential service for nonpayment, including, but not limited to, alternative payment schedules, deferred payments, minimum payments, procedures for requesting amortization of the unpaid balance, and petition for bill review and appeal that are set forth in this policy.. The City assumes no responsibility for phone contact information that has not been kept up-to-date by the customer.

If the written notice under section 4 is returned through the mail as undeliverable, and the City is unable to make contact with the customer or an adult occupying the residence by telephone, and the City shall make a good faith effort to visit the service address and leave in a conspicuous place a notice of imminent discontinuation of residential service for nonpayment and a copy of this policy.

6. Alternative Payment Arrangements:

Any customer who is unable to pay for water service within the normal payment period may request an alternative payment arrangement to avoid disruption of service. The City will consider circumstances surrounding the request and make a determination as to whether the payment arrangement is warranted. The City will not discontinue residential water service for nonpayment if a person seeking to avoid discontinuation for nonpayment satisfies the following requirements:

a. Certification by Primary Care Provider

The person provides certification from a Primary Care Provider (General Practitioner, Obstetrician/Gynecologist, Pediatrician, Family Practice Physician, Primary Care Clinic, Hospital, or Outpatient Clinic) who certifies that the termination of service will be life-threatening or pose a serious threat to the health and safety of any resident of the premises where water service is provided.

AND

b. Low Income Eligibility



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The person demonstrates that they are a current recipient of CalWORKs, CalFresh, General Assistance, Medi-Cal, Supplemental Security Income/State Supplementary Payment Program, or California Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, PG&E CARE or that they have an annual income is less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

AND

c. Utility Amortization Plan Agreement

The person agrees to a payment arrangement for all delinquent charges. Arrangements that extend into the next billing period are considered an amortization plan, which must be in writing and signed by the customer.

- An amortization plan will amortize the unpaid balance over a period defined by the customer, not to exceed 12 months from the original date of the bill.
- The amortized payments will be combined with, and subject to the due date of, the customer's regular bill.
- The customer must comply with the terms of the amortization plan and remain current as charges accrue in each subsequent billing period.
- The customer may not request further amortization of any subsequent unpaid charges while paying delinquent charges pursuant to an amortization plan.

7. Failure to Comply with Amortization Plan Requirements or Failure to Pay New Charges During Amortization Plan:

Failure to comply with the terms of an approved amortization plan will result in the issuance of a written disconnection notice. Additionally, failure to pay any additional service charges incurred during the period of an approved amortization plan that become delinquent for 60 days shall result in a written disconnection notice. The disconnection notice will be in the form of a door hanger delivered to the premises no less than 5 business days in advance of discontinuance of service. Residential service shall be discontinued after 5 business days after the posting of the disconnection notice.

8. Disconnection Deadline:

All delinquent water service charges and associated fees must be received by the City by 5:00 p.m. on the day specified in the written disconnection notice.

9. Re-establishment of Service:

The customer will be charged a fee to re-establish service in the billing system regardless of whether the meter has physically been turned off. In order to resume or continue service that has been disconnected for non-payment, the customer must pay the total balance due including the re-establishment fee. The City will endeavor to reconnect service as soon as practical but, at a minimum, will restore service before the end of the next regular working day following payment of any past due amount and delinquent fees attributable to the termination of service. Water service that is turned on by any person other than City personnel or without City authorization may be subject to fines or additional charges or



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fees. Any damages that occur as a result of unauthorized restoration of service are the responsibility of the customer.

For current recipient of CalWORKs, CalFresh, General Assistance, Medi-Cal, Supplemental Security Income/State Supplementary Payment Program, or California Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, PG&E CARE or customers that have an annual income is less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level, the reestablishment fee shall not exceed \$50.

10. Re-establishment of Service After Business Hours:

Service restored after 5:00 pm Monday through Friday, weekends, or holidays will be charged an after-hours re-establishment fee. Service will not be restored after regular business hours unless the customer has been informed of the after-hours re-establishment fee and has signed an agreement acknowledging the fee and agreeing to contact the City's billing department no later than 9 a.m. the following business day to pay after-hours re-establishment fee. The after-hours re-establishment fee shall be imposed in addition to any penalties imposed for delinquency. City staff responding to service calls are not permitted to collect payment but will instruct the customer to contact the billing department before 9 a.m. the following business day.

Where water service is discontinued because a prior account has been closed (due to vacancy, or any other reason) and continued service at the property requires a new customer to set up a new account and the City has not received a request to establish service, the new customer may request service to be re-connected after regular business hours. If such service is restored after regular business hours in such circumstances, the customer must contact the billing department to establish a service account the next business day in order for the after-hours re-establishment fee to be waived.

For current recipient of CalWORKs, CalFresh, General Assistance, Medi-Cal, Supplemental Security Income/State Supplementary Payment Program, or California Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, PG&E CARE or customers that have an annual income is less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level, the after-hours reestablishment fee shall not exceed \$150.

12. Notification of Disposition of Returned Check

Upon receipt of a returned check taken as payment of water service or other charges, the City will consider the account not paid.

If an account has already been delinquent for more than 60 days, the City will make a reasonable, good faith effort to notify the customer by door tag of the returned check and a 48-hour notice of termination of service due to a returned check will be generated. Water service will be disconnected if the amount of the returned check and the returned check charge are not paid on or before the date specified in the notice of termination. All amounts paid to redeem a returned check and to pay the returned check charge must be in cash, credit card or certified funds.



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If an account has not be delinquent for more than 60 days, staff shall notify the customer of the returned check and the delinquent status of the account but follow requirements for customer notification in Section 4 and Section 5 of this policy prior to disconnection of service.

Non-negotiable checks issued for payment of accounts that have an existing amortization plan under section 7 shall be subject to the notification requirement in section 7 prior to disconnection, and shall be subject to any applicable fees for returned checks.

13. Returned Checks for Previously Disconnected Service:

In the event a customer tenders a non-negotiable check as payment to restore water service previously disconnected for non-payment and the City restores service, the City may promptly disconnect service without providing further notice.

Any customer issuing a non-negotiable check as payment to restore service turned off for non-payment shall also be required to pay cash, credit card or certified funds to restore future service disconnections for a period of 12 months from the date of the returned payment.

14. Disputed Bills:

If a customer disputes the water bill, a Utility Bill Appeal Form must be submitted in order for a case to be registered. The City will not disconnect water service for non-payment while the appeal is pending.