

# Avoid Electric or Gas Shut Offs!

## Keeping Your Lights and Heat On

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### Did You Get a Shut Off Notice?

If so, you have certain rights that may help you prevent the shut off. The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) has consumer protections to help prevent disconnections.

Your utility company can shut off your service or send you a shut off notice:

- If you do not pay your bill
- If you do not follow through on payment arrangements
- If you make a payment with a bad check
- If you do not pay a deposit required by the utility

### Utilities Must Send a Shut Off Notice

Before your service is shut off, your Utility company must notify you.

- Prior to disconnecting service for nonpayment, PG&E, Edison, SoCal Gas and SDG&E must send a 15-day notice of termination (which may be combined with your regular bill) followed by a 48-hour notice, and must attempt to contact the customer by phone or in person.
- You should also receive an explanation for the proposed shut off and the options you have to prevent termination, such as payment arrangements, and the phone number for the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC).
- Your power cannot be shut off for nonpayment on Saturdays, Sundays, legal holidays other days when the utility's public offices are closed.

### Reasons to Challenge a High Bill

If you think your bill is wrong consider the following:

- Have you paid late or missed payments?
- Do you think you have been overcharged?
- Might your bill include usage from an earlier period of time, before the most recent billing period?
- Is your utility asking you to pay someone else's bill?
- Has your bill been estimated instead of being calculated based on an actual meter read?

### Steps to Prevent a Shut Off

If you have a high bill and have gotten a shut off notice:

- Set up a payment plan: Don't put off calling your utility company! PG&E, SDG&E, SoCal Gas and SoCal Edison can offer customers in danger of a shut off a payment plan that will allow you to continue receiving service while paying off your outstanding balance.  
**TIP:** If there is a change in circumstances (job loss, illness, etc.), call your utility immediately to see if you can revise your payment plan.
- Don't agree to a payment plan you can't afford! If you cannot afford the payment arrangement initially offered by your utility, explain that and ask for more lenient terms so that you can successfully pay off your outstanding balance. When you agree to a payment plan and do not stick to it, the entire amount you owe immediately becomes due.
- Be sure to alert your utility if you or someone in your household would face serious health or safety risks if your service were disconnected. The utility may offer more flexible payment arrangements.
- File a CPUC complaint if the utility won't work with you.

**Where Can I Get Financial Assistance?** Call the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LI-HEAP) at 1-866-675-6623 and apply for financial assistance. You can also call your utility and ask them for information about other programs they might offer.



PG&E	1-800-743-5000
SCE	1-800-655-4555
SDG&E	1-800-411-7343
SoCalGas	1-800-427-2200

### Medical Baseline or Special Medical Needs

If you are on Medical Baseline, Life Support, or self-certify to your utility that you have a serious illness or condition that could become life threatening if your service is disconnected, your utility (PG&E, SCE, SoCalGas, or SDG&E) will make an in-person visit within a few days of when a shut off is scheduled or at the time of disconnection for non payment.

SDG&E and SoCalGas will also extend this in-person visit to customers known to be elderly (62 or older) or with a disability. You can make a payment during this visit. Utility practices vary regarding the available payment options.

SoCalGas will additionally send a utility representative to the home of a customer who notifies the utility (before the disconnection notice expires) that she or he is unable to deliver payment in time to avoid the disconnection because of age or disability, so that the representative can collect payment at the customer's home. The utility may also verify the customer's need.

### What If You Have Already Been Shut Off?

- Call the utility company and try to make a payment arrangement. **You can ask for a 4 month payment plan.**
- You may be asked to pay one half of the past due bill. Try to negotiate a payment that is affordable, but remember, you still need to pay your regular monthly utility bill in addition to the payment arrangement amount.
- Ask them to waive the deposit or allow you to pay it over several months (CARE and FERA customers have specific rights regarding deposits, explained below).
- Sign up for CARE, FERA or Medical Baseline.

### New Deposit Rules

The utilities can require any residential customers to pay a deposit after being disconnected. Utilities can also require customers who are not on CARE or FERA to pay a deposit for late payment of bills. In either case, the deposit is calculated at twice the average monthly bill. For CARE or FERA customers:

- For deposits equal to or less than \$150, customers should be offered up to three months to pay, and
- For deposits greater than \$150, customers should be offered up to six months to pay.

### Exercise Your Rights

If you are denied service or assistance, you have the right to file a complaint with the California Public Utilities Commission at: <https://appsssl.cpuc.ca.gov/cpucapplication/> or call the CPUC at 1-800-649-7570.

However, it is important that you first contact the company to try to resolve any complaints.

### Become an Informed Consumer

Visit TURN at [www.turn.or](http://www.turn.or). Contact [amontes@turn.org](mailto:amontes@turn.org)

