

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

### Subchapter B. CUSTOMER SERVICE AND PROTECTION.

#### §25.31. Information to Applicants and Customers.

- (a) **Information to applicants.** Each electric utility must provide this information to applicants when they request new service or transfer existing service to a new location:
- (1) the electric utility's lowest-priced alternatives available at the applicant's location. The information must begin with the lowest-priced alternative and give full consideration to applicable equipment options and installation charges;
  - (2) the electric utility's alternate rate schedules and options, including time of use rates and renewable energy tariffs if available; and
  - (3) the customer information packet described in subsection (c) of this section. This is not required for the transfer of existing service.
- (b) **Information regarding rate schedules and classifications and electric utility facilities.**
- (1) Each utility must notify customers affected by a change in rates or schedule of classifications.
  - (2) Each electric utility must maintain copies of its rate schedules and rules in each office where applications are received.
  - (3) Each electric utility must post a notice in a conspicuous place in each office where applications are received, informing the public that copies of the rate schedules and rules relating to the service of the electric utility, as filed with the commission, are available for inspection.
  - (4) Each electric utility must maintain a current set of maps showing the physical locations of its facilities that includes an accurate description of all facilities (substations, transmission lines, etc.). These maps must be kept by the electric utility in a central location and will be available for commission inspection during normal working hours. Each business office or service center must have available up-to-date maps, plans, or records of its immediate service area, with other information as may be necessary to enable the electric utility to advise applicants, and others entitled to the information, about the facilities serving that locality.
- (c) **Customer information packets.**
- (1) The information packet must be entitled "Your Rights as a Customer". Cooperatives may use the title, "Your Rights as a Member".
  - (2) The information packet, containing the information required by this section, must be mailed to all customers on at least every other year at no charge to the customer.
  - (3) The information must be written in plain, non-technical language.
  - (4) The information must be provided in English and Spanish; however, an electric utility is exempt from the Spanish language requirement if 10% or fewer of its customers are exclusively Spanish-speaking. If the utility is exempt from the Spanish language requirement, it must notify all customers through a statement in both English and Spanish, in the packet, that the information is available in Spanish from the electric utility, both by mail and at the electric utility's offices.
  - (5) The information packet must include all of the following:
    - (A) the customer's right to information concerning rates and services and the customer's right to inspect or obtain at reproduction cost a copy of the applicable tariffs and service rules;
    - (B) the electric utility's credit requirements and the circumstances under which a deposit or an additional deposit may be required, how a deposit is calculated, the interest paid on deposits, and the time frame and requirement for return of the deposit to the customer;
    - (C) the time allowed to pay outstanding bills;
    - (D) grounds for disconnection of service;
    - (E) the steps that must be taken before an electric utility may disconnect service;
    - (F) the steps for resolving billing disputes with the electric utility and how disputes affect disconnection of service;

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- (G) information on alternative payment plans offered by the electric utility, including, but not limited to, deferred payment plans, level billing programs, average payment plans, as well as a statement that a customer has the right to request these alternative payment plans;
- (H) the steps necessary to have service reconnected after involuntary disconnection;
- (I) the customer's right to file a complaint with the electric utility, the procedures for a supervisory review, and right to file a complaint with the commission, regarding any matter concerning the electric utility's service. The commission's contact information: Public Utility Commission of Texas, Office of Customer Protection, P.O. Box 13326, Austin, Texas 78711-3326, (512) 936-7120 or in Texas (toll-free) 1-888-782-8477, fax (512) 936-7003, e-mail address: customer@puc.texas.gov, internet address: www.puc.state.tx.us, and Relay Texas (toll-free) 1-800-735-2989, must accompany this information;
- (J) the hours, addresses, and telephone numbers of electric utility offices and any authorized locations where bills may be paid and information may be obtained or a toll-free telephone number that would provide the customer with this information;
- (K) a toll-free telephone number or the equivalent (such as WATS or collect calls) where customers may call to report service problems or make billing inquiries;
- (L) a statement that electric utility services are provided without discrimination as to a customer's race, color, sex, nationality, religion, or marital status, and a summary of the company's policy regarding the provision of credit history based upon the credit history of a customer's former spouse;
- (M) notice of any special services such as readers or notices in Braille, if available, and the telephone number of the text telephone for the deaf at the commission;
- (N) how customers with physical disabilities, and those who care for them, can identify themselves to the electric utility so that special action can be taken to inform these persons of their rights.
- (O) the customer's right to have his or her meter tested without charge under §25.124 of this title (relating to Meter Testing);
- (P) the customer's right to be instructed by the utility how to read his or her meter, if applicable;
- (Q) a statement that funded financial assistance may be available for persons in need of assistance with their electric utility payments, and that additional information may be obtained by contacting the local office of the electric utility, Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs, or the Public Utility Commission of Texas. The main office telephone number (toll-free number, if available) and address for each state agency must also be provided; and
- (R) information that explains how a residential customer can be recognized as a critical load customer, the benefits of being a critical load customer in an emergency situation, and the process for being placed on the critical load list. For the purposes of this section a "critical load residential customer" is defined as a residential customer who has a critical need for electric service because a resident on the premises requires electric service to maintain life.