



# Managing Summer Water and Sewer Bills

Following Winter Storm Uri, the PUC ordered investor-owned water and sewer utilities to stop disconnecting customers for not paying their water and sewer bills. Customers protected from disconnection continue to receive bills and accrue charges. If a customer cannot pay these bills, help is available.

## What do PUC rules require?

A customer who cannot pay a bill in full should **contact his or her water or sewer utility**. If a customer indicates an inability to pay, **the water or sewer utility must inform the customer of all applicable payment options and assistance**. Depending on the customer's payment history, one of the following options may be available:

- A **payment arrangement** is an agreement between the utility and a customer to pay an outstanding bill after its due date, but before the next bill. This is sometimes called "an extension."
- A **deferred payment plan** allows a customer to pay an outstanding balance in installments. The utility shall offer a deferred payment plan to any residential customer if the customer's bill is more than three times the average monthly bill for that customer for the previous 12 months and if that customer has not been issued more than two disconnection notices at any time during the preceding 12 months.
- Water and sewer utilities are encouraged to offer a deferred payment plan to residential customers who cannot pay an outstanding bill in full but that are willing to pay an outstanding bill in reasonable installments. A deferred payment plan may include a finance charge that may not exceed an annual rate of 10% simple interest. Any finance charges must be clearly stated on the deferred payment arrangement.

## What other help is available?

In addition to plans required by PUC rules, water or sewer utilities may offer additional help, including lower down payments or more time to pay than the rules require.

- Community assistance agencies provide bill payment assistance to customers with past-due bills and some utility expenses. **Note: many agencies require a disconnection notice for a customer to receive priority assistance.**
- [211 Texas](#) is a free, anonymous hotline and website available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year that connects customers with assistance for many needs, including utility bill assistance.
- **Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs'** (TDHCA) [Texas Rent Relief Program](#) will cover past due, current and some future utility expenses (*up to 15 months total*). They are currently administering \$1.3 Billion in federal funds.

**DISCONNECTION MORATORIUM ENDING** – On June 11, 2021, the PUC ordered the end of the moratorium on disconnections for non-payment to take effect on June 18, 2021. Beginning June 19, 2021, investor-owned water and sewer utilities must issue new disconnection warning notices to customers whose past due accounts put them at risk of service termination. According to PUC rules, those notices will trigger a ten-day waiting period to allow customers to arrange for payment, meaning disconnections can resume on June 29, 2021.

**DISCONNECTION OF SERVICE** – A water or sewer utility may authorize disconnection of water or sewer service to a customer for nonpayment.<sup>1</sup> Prior to disconnection, the water or sewer utility must issue a disconnection notice no earlier than the due date of the bill and specify a disconnection date at least ten days after the notice is issued. **Disconnection is prohibited during an extreme weather emergency** (heat advisory issued by the National Weather Service). Additional notice and other protections are available for customers with health conditions that may worsen without access to water or sewer utility service.

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<sup>1</sup> Disconnection rules are numerous and detailed. This summary is intended to provide an overview of the most common scenarios.