

3.400 DISCONNECTION OF CABLE TELEVISION SERVICE AND NON-RESIDENTIAL ELECTRIC, GAS, AND WATER SERVICE

3.401 Definitions

The following definitions apply to Rule 3.400:

- (A) Disconnection: ~~deliberate interruption or disconnection of utility service to a ratepayer by the serving utility, not including disconnection at the request of or with the permission of the ratepayer.~~
- (A) Aggregate Data: customer account information from which all identifying information has been removed such that the data or information cannot be associated with a given customer without extraordinary effort.
- (B) Business Days: Monday through Thursday, excluding Vermont legal holidays and any other time, or the day before such time, when a company's business offices are not open to the public.
- (B)(C) Delinquency: failure of the ratepayer/customer to tender payment for a valid bill or charge (1) ~~within thirty days of the postmark date of that bill or charge,~~ or (2) for bills sent by mail, by a "due date" at least ~~thirty~~30 days after mailing, which ~~shall~~"due date" must be printed on the bill and which shall control, or (2) for bills sent electronically, within 30 days after electronic transmittal of the bill, the date of which and the "due date" must be included in the ~~absence of a postmark~~electronic transmission.
- (D) Notice: ~~except where otherwise provided~~Disconnection: the serving utility's intentional termination of a customer's utility service by any methods such as remotely via advanced metering infrastructure or physically on premises or where the context otherwise requires, notice shall mean at the pole. Disconnection includes interruption or limitation of service but does not include cessation of service made at the request of or with the permission of the customer or interruptions of service that are necessary for maintenance or repairs conducted by the utility.
- (C)(E) Notice: written notice of disconnection that is provided to the customer on a form approved by the Commission, except where otherwise provided, or by electronic notice, mailed or ~~delivered~~electronically transmitted within ~~forty~~40 days after delinquency, but not more than ~~twenty~~20 days, nor less than ~~fourteen~~14 days—seven if the ratepayer has failed to abide by the terms of an extended repayment plan—, prior to the first date on which disconnection of service. ~~Where, whether remote or on premises, may occur. If~~ payment has been made by a check or other instrument ~~which~~that is subsequently dishonored, then the number of days between delivery to the utility of the dishonored instrument and receipt by the utility of the notice of dishonor may be deducted from the minimum number of days ~~prior to before the~~ disconnection that notice must be sent, but in no event may that minimum number of days be less than four.
- (D)(F) Payment of Bill: receipt at the ~~company's~~company's business office or authorized payment agency of cash or of a check or other instrument ~~which~~that is subsequently honored.
- (E) Business Days: ~~Monday through Thursday, excluding Vermont legal holidays and any other time, or the day before such time, when the Company's business offices are not open to the public.~~

(G) Transmit: an act of the utility to convey any document, bill, or notice to a customer. Transmittal may be accomplished through verifiable means such as postal mail, in-person visits, or electronic transfer. Electronic transfer may include email, text message, app click-through, and other routine electronic message platforms.

3.402 **General Rule**

Except at the request of the ~~ratepayer~~customer or upon order of the Commission, no utility ~~shall~~may disconnect cable television service or non-residential gas, electric, or water service unless payment of a valid bill or charge is delinquent as defined herein, and notice of disconnection has been provided previously to the ~~ratepayer~~customer.

- (A) This rule ~~shall~~does not apply to any disconnection or interruption of services made necessary for reasons of health or of safety of the ~~ratepayer~~customer or the general public.
- (B) Disconnection ~~shall~~is not ~~be~~ permitted if the delinquency is due solely to a disputed portion of a charge ~~which~~that has been referred to the Commission by the ~~ratepayer~~customer or the utility, and the Commission has advised the utility not to disconnect service.
- (C) Any utility may elect, at its option, to offer an extended repayment plan for delinquent bills and/or a budget plan for future bills to ~~ratepayers~~customers covered by this rule.

- (D) A utility must provide notice to the property owner of a rental property if utility service to the property has been disconnected, even if the tenant is the customer, for the purpose of promoting safety, protection of property, and aid to tenants.
- (1) Utilities must retain and manage contact information for property owners of rental locations. Property owners must contact the utility to provide their contact information, and it is the property owner's responsibility to contact the utility to maintain up-to-date contact information. Utilities must retain contact information provided by property owners of rental locations.
- (2) Property owners may authorize an appropriate third-party representative for notice and provide such contact information as the utility deems necessary. However, utilities may not impose any significant paperwork burden. A utility may reasonably request proof of ownership such as a copy of a deed or tax bill if the property owner is not otherwise known to the utility.
- (3) A utility must provide notice to a property owner once by phone, text, or email before to 3:00 p.m. on the day of disconnection of gas, electric, or water utility service to any rental property for which the property owner has provided contact information for such purposes.
- (a) The notice must not include any personally identifiable information about the tenant at the disconnected location, or the tenant's account if the tenant is the customer, except that the utility may disclose information necessary to enable the property owner or other applicable third party to reconnect utility service to the property.
- (b) A utility may not disclose, sell, or transfer any personally identifying individual or aggregate data to a landlord or third-party property manager without the consent of the customer, unless otherwise provided by law.
- (c) Customer information that is specifically prohibited from disclosure includes customer names, telephone numbers, personally identifying electricity or gas account numbers, usage, and personally identifying payment history.
- (4) A follow-up written notice of disconnection of service(s) must be mailed to the property owner of any rental property within two business days of disconnection of gas, electric, or water service if the property owner and/or property manager has provided contact information and has requested written notice. This notice requirement may be satisfied if the utility contacts the property owner by phone or electronically via email or SMS text message if the property owner consents to electronic delivery. The written notice must include:
- (a) The title of a utility representative with whom the property owner may make an inquiry or complaint. The contact information and business hours of the company representative(s) must also be included.
- (b) The address, telephone numbers (including the toll-free number), website, email address, and business hours for the Department of Public Service, Consumer Affairs and Public Information Division ("CAPI"). A statement must be included which explains that CAPI can help customers negotiate with utilities or assist with filing a dispute with the Public Utility Commission.

(c) The itemized fees that may be charged to the property owner for the restoration of service. If a deposit may be required for restoration of service, then the utility must provide an explanation of how the amount will be calculated.

(d) The notice provided pursuant to subsection (3) above must inform the property owner of the option to receive a follow-up written notice.

3.403 Disconnection Notice Form

The notice form required under Section 3.402, and defined in Section 3.401, ~~shall~~must contain at least the following information:

(A) a statement that the ~~ratepayer's~~customer's account is delinquent, a statement of the amount of the delinquency, and a statement that service will be disconnected unless: (1) the delinquency is paid in full by a certain date; (2) the ~~ratepayer~~customer submits any disputed portion of the charge to the Commission and the Commission orders the utility not to disconnect service; or (3) if the utility offers an extended repayment plan for delinquent bills, the ~~ratepayer~~customer enters into such a plan;

(B) the dates and times of day when the utility may disconnect service if the ~~ratepayer~~customer does not take any of the actions as described in Section 3.403(A) above;

(C) the ~~names or~~ positions, addresses, telephone numbers and business hours of company representatives with whom the ~~ratepayer~~customer may discuss the delinquency or to whom the ~~ratepayer~~customer may make an inquiry or complaint;

(D) the address, telephone numbers, including the toll-free number, and business hours of the Consumer Affairs Division of the Department of Public Service, and a statement that, in addition to providing assistance or advice, the Division can provide information as to how to submit to the Commission a dispute over the existence of a delinquency;

~~(E) The~~(E) The itemized ~~cost~~fees that may be charged to the ~~ratepayer~~customer for the disconnection process, including those for notice, disconnection, collection, and later restoration of service and, if. No fees may be charged for remote disconnection of electric, natural gas, or water service. Fees may be charged for notice of disconnection to landlords or appropriate third parties, such as property managers. If a deposit may be required for restoration of service, an explanation of how the amount will be calculated must also be provided; and

~~(F)~~ A statement that utility services may be disconnected remotely, or at the pole or premises without a visit to the premises;

~~(F)~~(G) A statement that the address, time, and, date of disconnected utility services are reported to property owners, if the customer is not the property owner, when contact information for property owners is on file. Utilities must not use language in notices or messaging that could be construed as coercing payment by threatening to inform the landlord; and

~~(F)~~(H) any other information not inconsistent with the above and which has received prior approval of the Commission.

3.404 Time and Notice of Disconnection

Disconnection of utility service ~~shall~~must occur only between the hours of 8:00 ~~A.M.~~a.m. and 2:00

~~P.M.~~ p.m. of the business day when disconnected at a pole at or near the premises of the customer, specified on the notice of disconnection, or within four business days thereafter; ~~provided, however.~~ However, if a company has available personnel authorized to reconnect service and enter into arrangements on behalf of the utility until 8:00 ~~P.M.~~p.m. of a normal business day, the utility may disconnect service between the hours of 8:00 ~~A.M.~~a.m. and 5:00 ~~P.M.~~p.m. When service is disconnected remotely, it may only occur between the hours of 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. on a scheduled date of disconnection provided in the written notice as described previously.

When service is disconnected or interrupted at the premises of the ~~ratepayer~~customer, which ~~shall~~must include disconnection or interruption at a pole at or near the premises of the ~~ratepayer~~customer, the individual making the disconnection ~~shall~~must immediately inform a responsible adult on the premises that service has been disconnected or interrupted, or if no responsible adult is then present, ~~shall~~must leave on the premises in a conspicuous and secure place a notification advising that service has been disconnected or interrupted and what the ~~ratepayer~~customer has to do to have service restored.

3.405 **Restoration of Service**

If service has been disconnected or interrupted, the company ~~shall within twenty-four hours must~~ restore service within 24 hours upon the ~~ratepayer's~~customer's request when the cause for disconnection of service has been removed, when an agreement has been reached between the ~~ratepayer~~customer and the company regarding the dispute ~~which that~~ led to the disconnection, or when directed to do so by the Commission. Restoration of service, to the extent feasible, must be done so as to avoid charging customers for overtime wages and other unusual expenses.

~~Commission. Restoration of service, to the extent feasible, shall be done so as to avoid charging ratepayers for overtime wages and other abnormal expenses.~~

3.406 Filing Requirements

- (A) Within ~~thirty~~30 days after the effective date of this rule, all utilities subject to its provisions ~~shall~~must submit to the Commission for its review a copy of its disconnection notice form.

- (B) Within 30 days of the effective date of revisions to this rule, each utility must file tariff amendments to ensure that they are consistent with the provisions of this rule.