

WAC 480-110-355 Discontinuing of service. (1) Service may be disconnected either by customer direction or by company action:

(a) **Customer-directed.** Customers wanting to discontinue service must notify the water company. The company must disconnect the service as requested by the customer. If the customer fails to request disconnection of service the customer will be responsible to continue paying for water service at the company's tariff rate until the company becomes aware that the customer vacated the property.

(b) **Company-directed: Notice requirements** - After properly notifying the customer, as explained in subsection (3) of this section, the water company may discontinue service to its customers for:

(i) Unpaid bills, as provided for in WAC 480-110-375 (Form of bills);

(ii) Water use for purposes or properties other than those specified in the customer's application for service;

(iii) Willful waste of water through improper or defective piping, equipment, or otherwise;

(iv) Piping or equipment that does not meet the company's standards or fails to comply with other applicable codes and regulations;

(v) Tampering with the company's property;

(vi) Vacating the premises;

(vii) Nonpayment of any proper charges, including deposit, as provided in the company's tariff;

(viii) Refusing to allow access as required in WAC 480-110-305 (Access to premises);

(ix) Violating rules, service agreements, or effective tariffs, including violation of outdoor watering instructions given to customers in order to curtail water use during time of shortage;

(x) Use of equipment that detrimentally affects the company's service to its other customers.

(c) **Service obtained by fraud: No notice required before termination** - A water company may terminate service without notice when it discovers that a customer has obtained service fraudulently. Examples of fraud include: When service is connected without the company's knowledge, when service is obtained by fraudulent means or representations, or when service is used to provide service to other persons who are required to obtain their own service.

(i) **First offense:** The company may disconnect service immediately and without prior notice when it discovers fraud, unless the customer immediately pays:

(A) The tariff rate for service that the company estimates was taken fraudulently; plus

(B) All company costs resulting from the fraudulent use and all applicable fees; plus

(C) Any applicable required deposit.

(ii) **Second offense:** The company may disconnect service immediately and without prior notice when it discovers further fraud. The company may refuse to reconnect service to a customer who has been disconnected for further fraud.

(iii) **Commission review:** A customer may ask the commission to review any company determination of fraud through an informal or formal complaint. The company has the burden of proving that fraud occurred. However, this rule does not relieve any person who has committed fraud from civil or criminal responsibility.

(2) **Medical emergencies.** When a water company has cause to disconnect or has disconnected a residential service, it must postpone disconnection of service or must reinstate service for a grace period

of five business days after receiving either verbal or written notification of the existence of a medical emergency. In cases of actual emergencies when service is reinstated, payment of a reconnection charge and/or deposit shall not be required prior to reinstatement of service.

(a) The company may require that the customer, within five business days, submit written certification from a qualified medical professional stating that the disconnection of water service would significantly endanger the physical health of a resident of the household. "Qualified medical professional" means a licensed physician, nurse practitioner, or physician's assistant authorized to diagnose and treat the medical condition without supervision of a physician. Nothing in this section precludes a company from accepting other forms of certification, but the maximum the company can require is written certification. If the company requires written certification, it may require that the certification include some or all of the following information:

- (i) Residence location;
 - (ii) An explanation of how the physical health of the person will be endangered by disconnection of local service;
 - (iii) A statement of how long the condition is expected to last;
- and
- (iv) The title, signature and telephone number of the person certifying the condition.

(b) A medical emergency does not excuse a customer from paying delinquent and ongoing charges. The company may require that the customer do the following within the five business day grace period: Pay a minimum of twenty-five percent of the delinquent balance and enter into an agreement to pay the remaining delinquent balance within ninety days and to pay subsequent bills when due. Nothing in this section precludes the company from agreeing to an alternate payment plan, but the company may not require the customer to pay more than this subsection prescribes. The company must send a notice to the customer confirming the payment arrangements within two business days.

(c) If within the five-day grace period the customer fails to provide an acceptable payment arrangement, the company may disconnect service without further notice.

(d) If the customer fails to abide by the terms of the payment agreement the company may disconnect service without further notice.

(e) The medical certification is valid only for the length of time the health endangerment is certified to exist but no longer than six months unless renewed.

(3) **Required notice prior to disconnecting service.** Each water company must notify customers before disconnecting their service except in case of danger to life or property, fraudulent use, impairment of service, or violation of law. In all other cases, the company must not disconnect service until it has met the following requirements:

(a) The company must serve a written disconnection notice on the customer, either by mail, or, at the company's option, by personal delivery of the notice to the customer's address, attached to the primary door. Each disconnection notice must include:

- (i) A delinquent date that is no less than eight business days after the date of personal delivery or mailing if mailed from inside the state of Washington or a delinquent date that is no less than eleven days if mailed from outside of the state of Washington; and

- (ii) All pertinent information about the reason for the disconnection notice and how to correct the problem; and

(iii) The company's name, address, and telephone number by which a customer may contact the company to discuss the pending disconnection of service.

(b) In addition to (a) of this subsection, a second notice must be provided by one of the two options listed below:

(i) **Delivered notice.** The company must deliver a second notice to the customer and attach it to the customer's primary door. The notice must contain a deadline for compliance that is no less than twenty-four hours after the time of delivery that allows the customer until 5:00 p.m. of the following day to comply; or

(ii) **Mailed notice.** The company must mail a second notice, which must include a deadline for compliance that is no less than three business days after the date of mailing if mailed from within the state of Washington or six days if mailed outside the state of Washington.

(c) Disconnection notices must:

(i) Include detailed information pertinent to the situation; and

(ii) Include the company's name, address and telephone number by which the customer may contact the company to discuss the pending disconnection of service; and

(iii) Expire after ten business days from the first day that the company may disconnect service, unless other mutually agreed upon arrangements have been made and confirmed in writing by the company. If mutually accepted arrangements are not kept, the company may disconnect service without further notice.

(d) Except in case of danger to life or property, companies may not disconnect service on Saturdays, Sundays, legal holidays, or on any other day on which the company cannot reestablish service on the same or following day.

(e) A company employee dispatched to disconnect service must accept payment of a delinquent account at the service address if tendered in cash, but is not required to give change for cash tendered in excess of the amount due and owing. The company must credit any excess payment to the customer's account. When disconnection does not take place due to payment made by the customer, the company may assess a fee for the disconnection visit to the service address as provided in the company's tariff. The disconnection notice must describe the disconnection visit charge, the amount, and the circumstances under which the charge will be made.

(f) When service is provided through a master meter, or when the utility has reasonable grounds to believe service is to other than the customer of record, the company must undertake reasonable efforts to inform occupants of the service address of the impending disconnection. Upon request of one or more service users, where service is to other than the customer of record, a minimum period of five days must be allowed to permit the service users to arrange for continued service.

(g) When service is provided to a hospital, medical clinic with resident patients, or nursing home, notice of pending disconnection must be provided to the director of the Washington department of health, and to the customer. Upon request to the company from the Washington department of health director or designee, an additional five business days must be allowed before disconnecting service to allow the department to take whatever steps are necessary to protect the interests of resident patients who are responsibilities of the Washington department of health.

(h) Service may not be disconnected while the customer is pursuing any remedy or appeal provided by these rules or while engaged in discussions with the company's representatives or with the commission. However, any amounts not in dispute must be paid when due and any conditions posing a danger to health, safety, or property must be corrected.

(4) **Payments at a payment agency.** Payment of any past due amounts to a designated payment agency of the water company constitutes payment when the customer informs the company of the payment and the company has verified the payment with the payment agency.

(5) **Reconnecting water service after disconnection.** The water company must restore disconnected service when the customer has paid, or the company has agreed to bill, any reconnection charge and:

(a) The causes of disconnection are removed; or

(b) The customer pays all proper charges; or

(c) The customer pays any applicable deposit as provided for in the company tariff in accordance with WAC 480-110-335 (Establishing credit and deposits).

The commission may order reconnection pending resolution of any bona fide dispute between the company and the customer over the propriety of disconnection.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 80.01.040, 80.04.160, 81.04.160 and 34.05.353. WSR 05-06-051 (Docket No. A-021178 and TO-030288, General Order No. R-518), § 480-110-355, filed 2/28/05, effective 3/31/05. Statutory Authority: RCW 80.01.040. WSR 99-24-100 (Order R-467, Docket No. UW-980082), § 480-110-355, filed 11/30/99, effective 12/31/99.]