



Consumer Alert

The Real Story About Estimated Utility Bills

When it comes to paying utility bills, customers generally like to pay what they owe – no more and no less. That is why estimated bills are so aggravating. A high estimated bill usually results in overpayment, while a low estimate often requires a large "catch up" bill later.

Are Estimated Bills Legal?

The Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) has adopted administrative rules, referred to as billing rules, that govern utility company billing practices. For example, one rule states a utility company may estimate a customer's monthly bill every other month. Other rules include:

- An estimated bill must be clearly identified as an "estimated bill."
- Utilities may estimate a bill when certain conditions exist, such as extreme weather conditions, emergencies, work stoppages, or when other circumstances beyond the control of the utility prevent an actual reading.
- A utility, unable to gain access to a customer's home or yard to read the meter, shall use reasonable alternative measures to get an actual reading, including mailing or leaving a postage-paid, pre-addressed postcard for a customer to use to record the reading.
- Utilities may render estimated bills to seasonally billed customers in accordance with the rules approved by the MPSC.

- Utilities that cannot obtain an actual reading shall keep records of the reasons.

Customer Meter Read

At a customer's request, a utility company is required to provide a customer with the opportunity to read and report energy usage as long as the customer reports energy usage on a regular and accurate basis. The utility must also provide postage paid, pre-addressed meter read postcards upon request. And, at least once every 12 months, a utility **must** obtain an actual meter reading to verify the readings that have been reported by the customer.

Note: Late payment charges and service disconnection can result from failure to pay estimated bills.

Voluntary Termination Of Service

When terminating service at an address, be sure to request an actual read of your meter from the utility company.

Rule Violations

If you think your utility company has violated a billing rule regarding estimated bills, call the company to discuss and attempt to resolve the problem. If necessary, you can call the MPSC at 800.292.9555, or write to the MPSC at P.O. Box 30221, Lansing, MI 48909, or contact us at www.michigan.gov/mpsccomplaints

