

Frequently Asked Questions

Electric

1. Why are there so many electric outages?

Catastrophic storms (severe weather), weather (lightning, heavy ice, strong wind), trees (in and out of right-of-way), equipment failure, public interference (dig ins, car crashes, vandalism, third party contact), animals (raccoons, squirrels, birds) and scheduled maintenance are known causes of electric outages.

2. What are the rules that apply to electric restoration if a customer is waiting to be restored due to storm outages?

The rules for restoration of electric service can be found in the [Service Quality and Reliability Standards for Electric Distribution Systems](http://www.state.mi.us/orr/emi/admincode.asp?AdminCode=Single&Admin_Num=46000701&Dpt=LG&RngHigh=) at http://www.state.mi.us/orr/emi/admincode.asp?AdminCode=Single&Admin_Num=46000701&Dpt=LG&RngHigh=.

Rule 44 describes the penalty for failure to restore service after an interruption due to catastrophic conditions: "Unless an electric utility requests a waiver pursuant to part 5 of these rules, an electric utility that fails to restore service to a customer within 120 hours after an interruption that occurred during the course of catastrophic conditions shall provide to any affected customer that notifies the utility of the interruption with a bill credit on the customer's next bill. The amount of the credit provided to a residential customer shall be the greater of \$25.00 or the customer's monthly customer charge. The amount of the credit provided to any other distribution customer shall be the customer's minimum bill prorated on a daily basis."

3. What are the rules that apply to electric restoration if a customer is shut off for non-payment?

After a utility has shutoff service, it shall restore service promptly upon the customer's request when the cause has been cured or credit arrangements satisfactory to the utility have been made. Except for reasons beyond its control, the utility shall restore service not later than the first working day after the customer's request. The utility may assess the customer a charge, including reasonable costs, for restoring services and relocating the customer's meter as specified in the utility's approved schedule of rates and tariffs.

4. Can the utility company estimate my bill?

Utility companies are allowed to estimate a bill every other month. However, an estimated bill has to be clearly identified. Utilities may also estimate bills due to weather conditions, inaccessible meter (in the house, locked gate, dog in yard) meter locations, emergencies, work stoppage, or any other circumstances beyond the control of the utility company.

5. What are the guidelines for tree trimming?

Utilities are required to trim trees due to improve safety, efficiency, and reliability. The Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) and the National Electrical Safety Code (NESC) requires your utility company to trim trees that may interfere with overhead utility lines. (Untrimmed trees can result in outages, damages, injuries, and even deaths if not appropriately maintained). Michigan law states that a utility can gain what is known as a prescriptive easement. This means that the utility can gain access to power lines on private property without prior consent from the property owner. After a routine tree trimming job, the smaller pieces of debris may be turned into mulch, while the much larger pieces will be cut and left for the property owner to dispose of. The stumps are removed and then are cut as close to the ground as possible.

6. Does The MPSC regulate damages that occurred during storms and outages?

The MPSC does not have jurisdiction over damage claims. This problem would need to be settled between the utility company, the customer, and possibly the customer's insurance company.

7. Can a customer avoid disconnection due to a medical illness?

A utility can postpone the shutoff of service for 21 days at a time. The customer needs to produce a physician's certificate or notice from a public health or a social services official stating that the shutoff of service will aggravate an existing medical emergency with a permanent resident of the premises. This temporary hold will not exceed 63 continuous days in one billing year. Contact your utility company for details.

8. Am I required to give my Social Security Number when applying for new service?

A utility shall not require a customer or applicant who has prior utility service history with any electric or gas provider in Michigan or elsewhere during the previous 6 years to provide the utility with his or her social security number as a condition of obtaining or continuing a utility service. However, a utility may

ask for a picture identification and a copy of the birth certificate which is normally done in person.

9. What can I do if the company will not make payment arrangements?

Utility companies are not obligated to make payment arrangements (for example, if the customer has defaulted on a previous payment arrangement). However, utility companies rarely deny a payment arrangement. If you are denied a payment arrangement, you always have the option of locating agencies (for example, the Department of Human Services, Salvation Army, etc.) for assistance.