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Utility tips for renters and homeowners

Energy saving tips

There are many ways to improve the energy efficiency of your new home or apartment. Some include insulating, sealing air leaks, and installing ENERGY STAR appliances.

Even if you are on a tight budget there are several things you can do to help lower your utility bills, such as washing full loads of dishes and laundry, and purchasing a programmable thermostat.

You can also replace incandescent lightbulbs with light-emitting diodes (LED) bulbs, using about 75 percent less energy and lasting up to 10 times longer. For more energy saving tips visit www.energysavers.gov/tips

Obtaining service

Before moving out of a residence, contact your utility company about shutting off service to ensure you are not billed past your move-out date. Contact should be made 10 business days prior to the date you want service terminated.¹

When moving into a new home or apartment, you should be familiar with your rental agreement and aware of your utility responsibilities; do not assume service will automatically transfer into the proper name. The earlier you request new service the better.

Prior to contacting your utility company to establish service, make sure you have:

- correct address and/or apartment number,
- valid identification*, such as driver's license, passport, or military ID, and
- a signed copy of your rental agreement or deed.

The Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions Act of 2003 is intended to prevent fraudulent activity and identity theft, making it necessary for utility companies to verify customer identification.

Make sure to contact your utility company well in advance, so services will be ready to use upon moving in.

New customers may be required to pay a deposit, as a result of their records. Reasons may include an unfavorable credit rating, having an outstanding bill with the company, or filing bankruptcy within the previous six years.²

Utility companies may also require payment of previous unpaid accounts prior to establishing service.³

**Note: Utilities cannot require customers to provide their Social Security Number when applying for new service.*

Customer responsibility

If you do not receive a bill within the first or second month of living at a new

address, follow-up with the utility company to verify service has been established in your name. It is important to be proactive to assure services are in the appropriate name so service will not be shut off. This also helps prevent a large bill from accumulating, as you will be responsible for payments from the time you move in.

When sharing a lease with multiple tenants you may request to have all names put on the utility account. This will prevent one person from being held responsible if there is ever an overdue bill.

Bill payment

Utilities charge by the “billing month,”⁴ a 26 to 35-day cycle. You will receive a bill each month by mail, unless you agree on another delivery method, and will have 21 days from the date the bill was sent to pay in full.⁵

To avoid late payment charges and shutoff notices, bills must be paid in full and postmarked⁶ on or before the due date listed on the bill. Payments can be made online, by mail, over the phone, or in person at a customer office or authorized payment center.

Utility theft

The most dangerous form of unauthorized use of utility service is illegal connections, putting neighborhoods at risk with rigged wiring. However, unauthorized use of utility service is generally classified as any interference with a utility company’s ability to bill a customer.

For this reason, it is important to take responsibility for service from the date you move in. If your company says service is off

but you’re using gas and/or electric, be sure to inform the company. Keeping service on in the previous tenant’s name is also considered theft.

Unauthorized use of utility service is a felony and prosecutable by law. Utilities may pursue charges for all categories of theft, including tampering with or bypassing gas and electric meters.

Trouble paying the bill

If you have trouble paying your bill, contact your utility company to discuss payment plan options. Qualifying customers can also receive assistance from agencies such as the Department of Health and Human Services, The Heat and Warmth Fund (THAW) and the Salvation Army.

For a list of assistance agencies in your area, contact your local United Way by dialing 211.

Further assistance

If a problem cannot be resolved by speaking with your utility company, contact the MPSC

- toll free at 800-292-9555
- online at www.michigan.gov/mpsc
- by fax at 517-284-8185
- by mail at:

**Michigan Public Service Commission
P.O. Box 30221
Lansing, MI 48909**

¹R 460.127

⁵R 460.123

²R 460.109

³R 460.106

⁴R 460.120

⁶R 460.124

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