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Utility related senior programs and protections

Are you age 65 or older? If so, inform your utility company. There are programs to protect and assist you if you are having difficulty paying your gas, electric, or telephone bill.

Winter protections from shutoff

The Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) and state law require all regulated gas and electric companies, and municipal electric utilities, to provide shutoff protection for seniors, age 65 and older, during the heating season (November 1 through March 31).¹

If your gas or electric service is shut off before November 1, MPSC rules or state law require the utility to restore your service during the heating season without paying the past due amount, a deposit, reconnect fee, or other charges. There are no requirements for specific payment amounts during this time. When the heating season is over, your account will be placed on a payment plan and payment must begin immediately.

Consumers Energy and DTE Energy have programs that help customers manage energy payments with extended time to pay.

Shutoffs outside of the heating season for all customers can occur only between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. Prior to a shutoff, a 10-day disconnect notice will be sent and the utility will make at least two telephone attempts to contact you before utility service is shut off.

Third party notification

You can designate someone else, such as a family member or friend, to receive bills, shutoff notices, or other mailings from the utility on your behalf. This allows a third party to help you keep track of your utility bills.

Medical Emergency and Critical Care Customers

An energy bill that is subject to shutoff may qualify for shut off protections under a Medical Emergency or Critical Care shutoff protection program. To see if you may qualify for either of the programs contact your utility.

Partial payment option

Income-eligible customers of DTE Energy or Consumers Energy who receive a shutoff notice, and are unable to pay the full amount of a bill, may make partial payments. There is also the option to designate either gas or electric service for termination. Contact your utility for details.

State Emergency Relief (SER)

If you receive a shutoff notice, help may be available in paying your utility bills from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) from November 1 through May 31. SER is also available for fuel oil, wood or propane. You do not have to be a client of DHHS to apply for SER. Call your local **DHHS** for assistance.

Home Heating Credit (HHC)

You may apply for the HHC until September 30 of each year but must be income eligible. You do not have to file an income tax return. Forms are available from the Michigan Department of Treasury at **517-636-4486**. Call **211** for form assistance.

Budget billing plan

Take the seasonal ups and downs out of your energy bills and pay the same amount each month. Call your utility to find out more.

Earned Income Tax Credit (EIC)

If you are income eligible and still working you may file a tax return for this federal income tax credit. You may be able to reduce the amount of taxes owed and receive a credit. Call the IRS at **800-829-1040**.

State Earned Income Tax Credit (SEIC) When you file taxes, if eligible, you may claim a Michigan Earned Income Tax Credit. This credit is equal to a percentage of the federal earned income tax credit. Call the Michigan Department of Treasury at **517-636-4486**.

Elder Law of Michigan

Older adults and people with disabilities may receive help paying utilities, along with other basic needs such as food, medicine, housing, healthcare and taxes. Call **800-347-5297**.

Aging and Adult Services Agency (AASA)

For programs and services for adults age 60 and over call **517-373-8230**.

Lifeline Telephone Service

If you are an income-eligible senior, you may qualify for the monthly Lifeline telephone service discount. Call your telephone provider for more information.

Weatherization

Income-eligible households may receive free energy conservation materials such as caulking, weather-stripping, insulation, and other services. This will help reduce energy waste and lower utility bills. Services are administered by local community action agencies and nonprofit organizations. Call DHHS at **517-373-8896** to find a local weatherization contractor, or visit the website at www.michigan.gov/weatherization.

Michigan Veteran's Trust Fund

Eligible wartime veterans and their families can apply for temporary assistance for emergencies or hardships that include energy assistance. Call **800-642-4838** or visit the web at www.michiganveterans.com.

Who to call for help?

Call **211** for free and confidential phone service 24 hours a day. 211 will provide information and referrals for agencies in your community that can assist with utility, food, housing, employment, childcare, transportation, health, senior services, and more.

Michigan Agency for Energy and **Michigan Public Service Commission** staff can assist in resolving difficult issues with your utility company. Call toll free at **800-292-9555**.

¹ R 460.132