



California Public Utilities Commission
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PRESS RELEASE

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CPUC IMPLEMENTS CONSUMER PROTECTIONS TO ASSIST RESIDENTIAL AND SMALL BUSINESS CUSTOMERS

SAN FRANCISCO, December 17, 2020 - The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) today announced actions it is taking to ensure California consumers have access to essential and affordable utility services, including measures to reduce energy and communications disconnections and a process to handle customer arrearages during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The CPUC approved a Disconnection Citation Program to enforce energy utility compliance with CPUC [Decision 20-06-003](#), which is designed to reduce the number of residential customer disconnections. The disconnection rules provide directions on residential disconnection caps, customer assistance programs, disconnection notices, and penalties. The penalties in the Disconnection Citation Program for noncompliance are based on specified violations and range from \$500 to \$100,000 per violation. If a pattern of misconduct emerges, the violations may be addressed by a formal CPUC investigation or other enforcement actions. The Disconnection Citation Program is applicable to Southern California Edison (SCE), Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E), San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E), and Southern California Gas Company (SoCalGas). The proposal voted on (Res UEB-006) is available at

<https://docs.cpuc.ca.gov/PublishedDocs/Published/G000/M354/K960/354960910.pdf>.

“As the number of COVID-19 cases in the state spike and Californians are once more subjected to further stay-at-home orders and economic disruption, we are reminded of the vitality of electricity, natural gas, and telecommunication services,” said Commissioner Martha Guzman Aceves. “We must provide protections from disconnections for these vital utilities. The enforcement citations are critical to ensuring that our consumer protection regulations on natural gas and electricity companies are complied with uniformly.”



To help reduce the number of low-income and vulnerable customers who could be disconnected for nonpayment of their utility bills, the CPUC adopted a process to handle customer arrearages with Arrearage Management Plans proposed by PG&E, SCE, SDG&E, and SoCalGas. Arrearages are billed amounts for electric or natural gas service that customers owe to the utility companies but have not paid. The Arrearage Management Plans program forgives past due arrearages for participants in return for on-time payment of current monthly bills. Eligible participants for the Arrearage Management Plans include customers enrolled in income-qualified assistance programs such as the California Alternate Rates for Energy (CARE) and Family Electric Rate Assistance (FERA) programs. The utilities will recover the costs of the forgiven arrearages through the Public Purpose Program Charge from all customers. Additionally, the utilities will make remittance payments to Community Choice Aggregators (CCAs) for customers enrolled in Arrearage Management Plans to compensate CCAs for the cost of forgiven arrearages by unbundled customers. The proposal voted on (Res E-5114) is available at

<https://docs.cpuc.ca.gov/PublishedDocs/Published/G000/M355/K081/355081694.pdf>.

Further, to ensure continued access to essential utility voice services, the CPUC ordered communications providers to halt residential and small business customer disconnections for non-payment and from charging late fees for late payment of voice services. This moratorium on disconnections and late fees will allow 30 days for implementation and then last for 90 days, with an option to extend. The proposal voted on (Res M-4848) is available at

<https://docs.cpuc.ca.gov/PublishedDocs/Published/G000/M355/K406/355406828.PDF>.

In response to the impacts of COVID-19, the CPUC is continuing to identify opportunities to help ensure that utility customers in California receive safe, reliable, and affordable utility services. The CPUC has implemented policies and procedures to reduce utility service disconnections in the past. Today's decisions are important steps to ensure that low-income and other vulnerable populations do not face a sudden loss of essential utility services.

Read more about these actions and other steps the CPUC is taking to ensure utilities under its jurisdiction are supporting communities during these challenging times by visiting

www.cpuc.ca.gov/covid.



For a list of consumer protections utilities are enacting in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, please visit www.cpuc.ca.gov/covid19protections.

The CPUC regulates services and utilities, protects consumers, safeguards the environment, and assures Californians' access to safe and reliable utility infrastructure and services. For more information on the CPUC, please visit www.cpuc.ca.gov.

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