

# Safety Net Programs

Electric and natural gas utilities offer safety net programs for their customers. They are:

- Deferred Payment Plan (DPP)
- Medical Certificate
- Third-Party Notification
- Special Needs Customers (SNC)
- Disconnection Temperature Rule
- 10-Day and 3-Day Written Notice of Termination

## Deferred Payment Plan (DPP)

In a DPP, the utility company may divide the past due balance into a *maximum* of 6 monthly payments.

- The customer must continue to pay current billed charges.
- If the customer does not keep up with the payment arrangement, the utility may disconnect service after sending written notice.

## Medical Certificate

A medical certificate prevents disconnection of electric and/or natural gas service from December through March for eligible residential customers.

- A certificate must be completed by the customer and the customer's licensed health care provider.
  - The health care provider certifies that the customer received a medical exam and that disconnection of electric and natural gas service would be dangerous to the customer's health because of a medical condition.
  - By completing the form, the customer certifies he/she is unable to pay in full or by installment payments.
- The Medical Certificate **does not**

mean the customer no longer has to pay his/her bill. Upon expiration of the Medical Certificate or through the end of March — whichever comes first — service may be disconnected if payment is not made.

## Third-Party Notification

Customers may name a third party to receive a copy of a disconnection notice for their account in the event electric or natural gas service is scheduled to be disconnected.

- To designate a third party, the utility needs the following information for that person:
  - Name
  - Address
  - Telephone number

## Special-Needs Customers (SNC)

New customers are told about SNC registration by the utility company.

- Special-Needs Customers are:
  - 65 years of age or older, or
  - Disabled, or
  - Chronically ill, or
  - Seriously ill, or
  - On life support as noted by a Medical Certificate
- Customers who meet the criteria for special needs should register with their electric or natural gas utility.
- If requested, the utility will provide:
  - SNC registration form
  - Medical Certificate form

## 10-Day and 3-Day Written

### Notice of Termination

These notices are sent to the customer when disconnection of service is scheduled. The notification process is as follows:

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1. A 10-day written notice is sent to the customer and any designated third party providing 10 days to submit payment or make a payment arrangement with the utility.
  2. If no payment is received or no payment arrangement is made during that 10-day period, a 3-day written *final notice* is sent to the customer and any designated third party.

If the customer facing disconnection is registered as a Special-Needs Customer:

1. Before disconnection, the disconnection crew will make contact with the SNC customer or responsible party at the residence.
2. Disconnection will be suspended if the SNC or responsible party tells the disconnection crew about a serious health condition or asks for a payment extension.
3. The disconnection crew will advise the utility of the suspension.
4. The utility will follow its internal special-needs review process before disconnecting service.

## Disconnection Temperature Rule

During the heating and cooling seasons, service for customers will not be disconnected if temperatures fall within a certain range.

- Heating season: December 1 — March 31
- Cooling season: June 1 — August 31
- Disconnection is suspended when:
  - Average forecasted temperature is 32 degrees Fahrenheit or below for a 48-hour period
  - Forecasted heat index is 105 degrees Fahrenheit or more for a 24-hour period



## Contact the ORS

Contact the Consumer Services Division of the ORS with questions or concerns when a disconnection notice is received. Consumer Services may be able to help arrange payment plans with your utility and direct you to social service agencies.

**Phone** 803-737-5230 (Columbia, S.C.)  
1-800-922-1531 (toll-free in S.C.)  
803-737-5175 TTY (Columbia, S.C.)  
1-800-334-2217 TTY (toll-free in S.C.)

**Fax** 803-737-4750

**Web** [www.regulatorystaff.sc.gov](http://www.regulatorystaff.sc.gov)

**Hours** 8:30 a.m.—5:00 p.m.  
Monday through Friday  
(closed state holidays)

## About the ORS

The S.C. Office of Regulatory Staff (ORS) was created in 2004 by the S.C. General Assembly.

The ORS represents the public interest of South Carolina in utility regulation with regard to rates, charges, service standards, facilities, and practices of the major utility industries — electric, natural gas, telecommunications, water/wastewater, and transportation — before the Public Service Commission of South Carolina (PSC), the court system, the S.C. General Assembly, and federal regulatory bodies. The ORS has responsibility for oversight of railroad safety and natural gas pipeline safety in the state.

In fulfilling this mission, the ORS strives to balance the concerns of the using and consuming public, the financial integrity of public utilities, and the economic development of South Carolina.

# Electric & Natural Gas Safety Net Programs



## Information for Consumers