

TURN has won new consumer protections that will help customers to avoid shut offs and keep their lights on. Thanks to TURN's advocacy, customers must be offered affordable payment plans and fewer and smaller deposits will be required. If you've received a shut-off notice, TURN recommends that you follow these steps:

**Step 1. Call your utility company.** PG&E, SDG&E, SoCal Gas and SoCal Edison are required to offer customers in danger of shut off a payment plan that will allow them to continue receiving service while paying off their outstanding balance. ***It is your responsibility as a customer to contact the utility to request payment arrangements.*** The utility must offer a minimum of three months, but should be willing to extend payments for longer.

**Step 2. Make sure you are receiving any rate discounts or other assistance you are eligible for,** such as low-income **CARE rates**, **FERA rates**, **medical baseline rates** and **other programs**. If you are eligible but haven't been receiving the discount, ask the utility to go back and re-calculate your bills.

**Step 3. If You Are Low-Income, Seek Help.** For eligible low-income customers, financial assistance programs can help avoid shut-offs. Call the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (**LI-HEAP**) at 1-866-675-6623 and the Relief for Energy Assistance through Community Help (**REACH**) at 1-800-933-9677 for details.

**Step 4. Don't agree to an installment plan you can't afford!** When you agree to an installment plan and do not stick to it, the entire amount you owe immediately becomes due and service may be terminated after 48 hours notice, either by phone or in writing. However, if there was a change in circumstances (job loss, illness, etc.), you may be able to argue that a revised plan is necessary.

**Step 5.** Your utility company should propose a payment schedule that takes into account your individual financial situation and your payment history. **If you have difficulty reaching an agreement with your utility, contact the CPUC at 1.800.649.7570 (press "0" when the automated voice menu picks up) or file a complaint through the TURN website at [www.turn.org](http://www.turn.org).** Once you have filed a complaint with the CPUC, your utility has 10 days to respond. If the proposed termination is scheduled to occur within these 10 days, urge the CPUC representative to assist you in getting a quicker response from your utility. The CPUC can also help you and your utility reach an agreement.

**Step 6. Review deposit requirements.** TURN recently won new rules that protect consumers from unreasonable deposit requirements. Customers who are on California Alternate Rates for Energy (CARE) or Family Electric Rate Assistance (FERA) customers are not required to pay additional reestablishment of credit deposits with a regulated utility company for either slow-payment/no-payment of bills or following a disconnection. PG&E, SDG&E, So Cal Gas and So Cal Edison cannot require credit deposits for late payment of bills, and must limit reestablishment of credit deposits to twice the average monthly bill.

**Step 7. Contact your utility company if you're having trouble making payments and try to negotiate a new payment plan.** Failure to inform your utility company that you will be late on making a payment or sticking to a payment plan can trigger a 48-hour shut off notice.

### Step 8. Review rules governing utility shut-offs.

The most common reason utility service gets shut off is nonpayment. However, even in cases of nonpayment, there are certain requirements and limits a utility must abide by before disconnecting a customer.

- Your power cannot be shut off for nonpayment on Saturdays, Sundays, legal holidays other days when the utility's public offices are closed.
- Medical baseline or life support customers will not be disconnected without an in-person visit from a utility representative.
- You must be notified before your power is shut-off. PG&E and SDG&E customers are entitled to a 15-day notice of termination followed by a 48-hour notice. SCE customers must receive a 15-day notice followed by a 5-day notice. You should also receive an explanation for the proposed shut-off and the options you have to prevent termination, such as payment arrangements and appeals to your utility or the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC).

### Avoiding A Shut Off During a Billing Dispute

Failure to follow the proper procedures while disputing a bill can result in a shut-off. If you think your bill is incorrect you should first try to negotiate with the utility by requesting to speak with a manager or supervisor. If that fails, you should file a complaint with the CPUC immediately. If you file a complaint within 5 days of receiving the disputed bill, your power cannot be shut off until the CPUC has issued a decision and the case has been closed. (Even if more than 5 days have passed, however, appealing to your utility and/or the CPUC in an attempt to work something out may buy you some time and is always worth a try).

Don't wait for a shut off notice to contact the CPUC if you want to dispute your bill. Protect yourself by notifying your utility as soon as possible of your intent to dispute your bill and your reasons for doing so. You should also make sure that any bills you receive after the disputed one are paid in full (minus any disputed amount) and on time.

### Municipal Utilities

The CPUC has no jurisdiction over municipal utilities (ones owned by your city or town). The policies of municipal utilities are governed by a board of directors, and customers of municipals should contact board members or staff for assistance.

If you have additional questions, contact **TURN's Consumer Hotline at (800) 355-8876** or [consumerhotline@turn.org](mailto:consumerhotline@turn.org).