

CHAPTER 25. SUBSTANTIVE RULES APPLICABLE TO ELECTRIC SERVICE PROVIDERS.

Subchapter R. CUSTOMER PROTECTION RULES FOR RETAIL ELECTRIC SERVICE.

§25.483. Disconnection of Service.

- (a) **Disconnection and reconnection policy.** Only a transmission and distribution utility (TDU), municipally owned utility, or electric cooperative may perform physical disconnections and reconnections. Unless otherwise stated, it is the responsibility of a retail electric provider (REP) to request such action from the appropriate TDU, municipally owned utility, or electric cooperative in accordance with that entity's relevant tariffs, in accordance with the protocols established by the registration agent, and in compliance with the requirements of this section. If a REP chooses to have a customer's electric service disconnected, it must comply with the requirements in this section. Nothing in this section requires a REP to request that a customer's service be disconnected.
- (b) **Disconnection authority.**
- (1) Any REP may authorize the disconnection of a medium non-residential or large non-residential customer, as that term is defined in §25.43 of this title (relating to Provider of Last Resort (POLR)).
 - (2) Except as provided in subsection (d) of this section, all REPs may authorize the disconnection of residential and small non-residential customers pursuant to commission rules. Prior to authorizing disconnections for non-payment in accordance with this paragraph, a REP must:
 - (A) test all necessary electronic transactions related to disconnections and reconnections of service; and
 - (B) file an affidavit from an officer of the company, in a project established by the commission for this purpose, affirming that the REP understands and has trained its personnel on the commission's rule requirements related to disconnection and reconnection, and has adequately tested the transactions described in subparagraph (A) of this paragraph.
- (c) **Disconnection with notice.** A REP having disconnection authority under the provisions of subsection (b) of this section, including the POLR, may authorize the disconnection of a customer's electric service after proper notice and not before the first day after the disconnection date in the notice for any of the following reasons:
- (1) failure to pay any outstanding bona fide debt for electric service owed to the REP or to make deferred payment arrangements by the date of disconnection stated on the disconnection notice. Payment of the delinquent bill at the REP's authorized payment agency is considered payment to the REP;
 - (2) failure to comply with the terms of a deferred payment agreement made with the REP;
 - (3) violation of the REP's terms and conditions on using service in a manner that interferes with the service of others or the operation of nonstandard equipment, if a reasonable attempt has been made to notify the customer and the customer is provided with a reasonable opportunity to remedy the situation;
 - (4) failure to pay a deposit as required by §25.478 of this title (relating to Credit Requirements and Deposits); or
 - (5) failure of the guarantor to pay the amount guaranteed, when the REP has a written agreement, signed by the guarantor, which allows for disconnection of the guarantor's service.
- (d) **Disconnection without prior notice.** Any REP or TDU may, at any time, authorize disconnection of a customer's electric service without prior notice for any of the following reasons:
- (1) Where a known dangerous condition exists for as long as the condition exists. Where reasonable, given the nature of the hazardous condition, the REP or its agent must post a notice of disconnection and the reason for the disconnection at the place of common entry or upon the front door of each affected residential unit as soon as possible after service has been disconnected;

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- (2) Where service is connected without authority by a person who has not made application for service;
 - (3) Where service is reconnected without authority after disconnection for nonpayment;
 - (4) Where there has been tampering with the equipment of the transmission and distribution utility, municipally owned utility, or electric cooperative; or
 - (5) Where there is evidence of theft of service.
- (e) **Disconnection prohibited.** A REP having disconnection authority under the provisions of subsection (b) of this section must not authorize a disconnection for nonpayment of a customer's electric service for any of the following reasons:
- (1) Delinquency in payment for electric service by a previous occupant of the premises;
 - (2) Failure to pay for any charge that is not for electric service regulated by the commission, including competitive energy service, merchandise, or optional services;
 - (3) Failure to pay for a different type or class of electric service unless charges for such service were included on that account's bill at the time service was initiated;
 - (4) Failure to pay charges resulting from an underbilling, except theft of service, more than six months prior to the current billing;
 - (5) Failure to pay disputed charges, except for the amount not under dispute, until a determination as to the accuracy of the charges has been made by the REP or the commission, and the customer has been notified of this determination;
 - (6) Failure to pay charges arising from an underbilling due to any faulty metering, unless the meter has been tampered with or unless such underbilling charges are due under §25.126 of this title (relating to Adjustments Due to Non-Compliant Meters and Meter Tampering in Areas Where Customer Choice Has Been Introduced); or
 - (7) Failure to pay an estimated bill other than a bill rendered pursuant to an approved meter-reading plan, unless the bill is based on an estimated meter read by the TDU.
- (f) **Disconnection on holidays or weekends.**
- (1) A REP having disconnection authority under the provisions of subsection (b) of this section must not request disconnection of a customer's electric service for nonpayment on a holiday or weekend, or the day immediately preceding a holiday or weekend, unless the REP's personnel are available on those days to take payments, make payment arrangements with the customer, and request reconnection of service.
 - (2) Unless a dangerous condition exists or the customer requests disconnection, a TDU must not disconnect a customer's electric service on a holiday or weekend, or the day immediately preceding a holiday or weekend, unless the personnel of the TDU are available to reconnect service on all of those days.
- (g) **Disconnection of Critical Care Residential Customers.** A REP having disconnection authority under the provisions of subsection (b) of this section must not authorize a disconnection for nonpayment of electric service at a permanent, individually metered dwelling unit of a delinquent Critical Care Residential Customer when that customer establishes that disconnection of service will cause some person at that residence to become seriously ill or more seriously ill.
- (1) Each time a Critical Care Residential Customer seeks to avoid disconnection of service under this subsection, the customer must accomplish all of the following by the stated date of disconnection:
 - (A) Have the person's attending physician (for purposes of this subsection, the "physician" means any public health official, including medical doctors, doctors of osteopathy, nurse practitioners, registered nurses, and any other similar medical professional) contact the REP to confirm that the customer is a Critical Care Residential Customer;

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- (B) Have the person's attending physician submit a written statement to the REP confirming that the customer is a Critical Care Residential Customer; and
- (C) Enter into a deferred payment plan.
- (2) The prohibition against service disconnection of a Critical Care Residential Customer provided by this subsection lasts 63 days from the issuance of the bill for electric service or a shorter period agreed upon by the REP and the customer, emergency (secondary) contact listed on the commission-approved application form, or attending physician. If the Critical Care Residential Customer does not accomplish the requirements of paragraph (1) of this subsection:
 - (A) The REP must provide written notice to the Critical Care Residential Customer and the emergency contact listed on the commission-approved application form of its intention to disconnect service not later than 21 days prior to the date that service would be disconnected. Such notice must be a separate mailing or hand delivered notice with a stated date of disconnection with the words "disconnection notice" or similar language prominently displayed. If the REP has offered and the customer has agreed for the customer and/or emergency contact to receive disconnection notices from the REP by email, a separate email with the words "disconnection notice" or similar language in the subject line must be sent in addition to the separate mailing or hand delivered notice. Except as provided in this subsection, the notice must comply with the requirements of subsections (l) and (m) of this section; and
 - (B) Prior to disconnecting a Critical Care Residential Customer, a TDU must contact the customer and the emergency contact listed on the commission-approved application form. If the TDU does not reach the customer and emergency contact by phone, the TDU must visit the premises, and, if there is no response, must leave a door hanger containing the pending disconnection information and information on how to contact the REP and TDU.
- (3) If, in the normal performance of its duties, a TDU obtains information that a customer scheduled for disconnection may qualify for delay of disconnection pursuant to this subsection, and the TDU reasonably believes that the information may be unknown to the REP, the TDU must delay the disconnection and promptly communicate the information to the REP. The TDU must disconnect such customer if it subsequently receives a confirmation of the disconnect notice from the REP. Nothing herein should be interpreted as requiring a TDU to assess or to inquire as to the customer's status before performing a disconnection when not otherwise required.
- (4) If a TDU refuses to disconnect a Critical Care Residential Customer pursuant to this subsection, it must cease charging all transmission and distribution charges and surcharges, except securitization-related charges, for that premises to the REP.
- (h) **Disconnection of Chronic Condition Residential Customers.** A REP having disconnection authority under the provisions of subsection (b) of this section must not authorize a disconnection for nonpayment of electric service at a permanent, individually metered dwelling unit of a delinquent customer when that customer has been designated as a Chronic Condition Residential Customer pursuant to §25.497 of this title (relating to Critical Load Industrial Customers, Critical Load Public Safety Customers, Critical Care Residential Customers, and Chronic Condition Residential Customers), except as provided in this subsection. The REP must notify the Chronic Condition Residential Customer and the emergency contact listed on the commission-approved application form with a written notice of its intention to disconnect service not later than 21 days prior to the date that service would be disconnected. Such notice must be a separate mailing or hand delivered notice with a stated date of disconnection with the words "disconnection notice" or similar language prominently displayed. If the REP has offered and the customer has agreed for the customer and/or emergency contact to receive disconnection notices from the REP by email, a separate email with the words "disconnection notice" or similar language in the subject line must be also be sent in addition to the separate mailing or hand delivered notice. Except

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as provided in this subsection, the notice must comply with the requirements of subsections (l) and (m) of this section.

- (i) **Disconnection of energy assistance clients.**
- (1) A REP having disconnection authority under the provisions of subsection (b) of this section must not authorize a disconnection for nonpayment of electric service to a delinquent residential customer for a billing period in which the REP receives a pledge, letter of intent, purchase order, or other notification that the energy assistance provider is forwarding sufficient payment to continue service provided that such pledge, letter of intent, purchase order, or other notification is received by the due date stated on the disconnection notice, and the customer, by the due date on the disconnection notice, either pays or makes payment arrangements to pay any outstanding debt not covered by the energy assistance provider.
 - (2) If an energy assistance provider has requested monthly usage data pursuant to §25.472(b)(4) of this title (relating to Privacy of Customer Information), the REP must extend the final due date on the disconnection notice, day for day, from the date the usage data was requested until it is provided.
 - (3) A REP must allow at least 45 days for an energy assistance provider to honor a pledge, letter of intent, purchase order, or other notification before submitting the disconnection request to the TDU.
 - (4) A REP may request disconnection of service to a customer if payment from the energy assistance provider's pledge is not received within the time frame agreed to by the REP and the energy assistance provider, or if the customer fails to pay any portion of the outstanding balance not covered by the pledge.
- (j) **Disconnection during extreme weather.** A REP having disconnection authority under the provisions of subsection (b) of this section must not authorize a disconnection for nonpayment of electric service for any customer in a county in which an extreme weather emergency occurs. A REP must offer residential customers a deferred payment plan upon request by the customer that complies with the requirements of §25.480 of this title (relating to Bill Payment and Adjustments) for bills that become due during the weather emergency.
- (1) The term "extreme weather emergency" means a day when:
 - (A) the previous day's highest temperature did not exceed 32 degrees Fahrenheit, and the temperature is predicted to remain at or below that level for the next 24 hours anywhere in the county, according to the nearest National Weather Service (NWS) reports; or
 - (B) the NWS issues a heat advisory for a county, or when such advisory has been issued on any one of the preceding two calendar days in a county.
 - (2) A TDU must notify the commission of an extreme weather emergency in a method prescribed by the commission, on each day that the TDU has determined that an extreme weather emergency has been issued for a county in its service area. The initial notice must include the county in which the extreme weather emergency occurred and the name and telephone number of the utility contact person.
- (k) **Disconnection of master-metered apartments.** When a bill for electric service is delinquent for a master-metered apartment complex:
- (1) The REP having disconnection authority under the provisions of subsection (b) of this section must send a notice to the customer as required by this subsection. At the time such notice is issued, the REP, or its agents, must also inform the customer that notice of possible disconnection will be provided to the tenants of the apartment complex in six days if payment is not made before that time.
 - (2) At least six days after providing notice to the customer and at least four days before disconnecting, the REP must post a minimum of five notices in English and Spanish in

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conspicuous areas in the corridors or other public places of the apartment complex. Language in the notice must be in large type and must read: "Notice to residents of (name and address of apartment complex): Electric service to this apartment complex is scheduled for disconnection on (date), because (reason for disconnection)."

- (l) **Disconnection notices.** A disconnection notice for nonpayment must:
- (1) not be issued before the first day after the bill is due;
 - (2) be a separate mailing or hand delivered notice with a stated date of disconnection with the words "disconnection notice" or similar language prominently displayed or, if the REP has offered and the customer has agreed to receive disconnection notices from the REP by email, be a separate email with the words "disconnection notice" or similar language in the subject line. The REP may send the disconnection notice concurrently with the request for a deposit;
 - (3) have a disconnection date that is not a holiday, weekend day, or day that the REP's personnel are not available to take payments, and is not less than ten days after the notice is issued; and
 - (4) include a statement notifying the customer that if the customer needs assistance paying the bill by the due date, or is ill and unable to pay the bill, the customer may be able to make some alternate payment arrangement, establish a deferred payment plan, or possibly secure payment assistance. The notice must also advise the customer to contact the provider for more information.
- (m) **Contents of disconnection notice.** Any disconnection notice must include the following information:
- (1) The reason for disconnection;
 - (2) The actions, if any, that the customer may take to avoid disconnection of service;
 - (3) The amount of all fees or charges which will be assessed against the customer as a result of the default;
 - (4) The amount overdue;
 - (5) A toll-free telephone number that the customer can use to contact the REP to discuss the notice of disconnection or to file a complaint with the REP, and the following statement: "If you are not satisfied with our response to your inquiry or complaint, you may file a complaint by calling or writing the Public Utility Commission of Texas, P.O. Box 13326, Austin, Texas, 78711-3326; Telephone: (512) 936-7120 or toll-free in Texas at (888) 782-8477. Hearing and speech impaired individuals may contact the commission through Relay Texas at 1-800-735-2989. Complaints may also be filed electronically at www.puc.texas.gov/ocp/complaints/complain.cfm;"
 - (6) If a deposit is being held by the REP on behalf of the customer, a statement that the deposit will be applied against the final bill (if applicable) and the remaining deposit will be either returned to the customer or transferred to the new REP, at the customer's designation and with the consent of both REPs;
 - (7) The availability of deferred payment or other billing arrangements, from the REP, and the availability of any state or federal energy assistance programs and information on how to get further information about those programs; and
 - (8) A description of the activities that the REP will use to collect payment, including the use of consumer reporting agencies, debt collection agencies, small claims court, and other remedies allowed by law, if the customer does not pay or make acceptable payment arrangements with the REP.
- (n) **Reconnection of service.** Upon a customer's satisfactory correction of the reasons for disconnection, the REP must request the TDU, municipally owned utility, or electric cooperative to reconnect the customer's electric service as quickly as possible. The REP must inform the customer when reconnection is expected to occur in accordance with the timelines set forth in this subsection and in §25.214 of this title (relating to Terms and Conditions of Retail Delivery Service Provided by Investor Owned Transmission and Distribution Utilities). For premises without a provisioned advanced meter

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with remote disconnect/reconnect capabilities, if a REP submits a standard reconnect request and the TDU completes the reconnect the same day, the TDU may assess a standard reconnect fee. A TDU may assess a same-day reconnect fee only when the REP expressly requests a same-day reconnect and a REP may pass through a same-day reconnect fee to the customer only when the customer expressly requests a same-day reconnect. A REP must send a reconnection request no later than the timelines in this subsection. The TDU must complete the reconnection in accordance with the timelines in §25.214 of this title.

- (1) For payments made before 12:00 p.m. on a business day, a REP must send a reconnection request to the TDU no later than 2:00 p.m. on the same day.
 - (2) For payments made after 12:00 p.m. but before 5:00 p.m. on a business day, a REP must send a reconnection request to the TDU by 7:00 p.m. on the same day.
 - (3) For payments made after 5:00 p.m. but before 7:00 p.m. on a business day, a REP must send a reconnection request to the TDU by 9:00 p.m. on the same day.
 - (4) For payments made after 7:00 p.m. on a business day, a REP must send a reconnection request to the TDU by 2:00 p.m. on the next business day.
 - (5) For payments made on a weekend day or a holiday, a REP must send a reconnection request to the TDU by 2:00 p.m. on the first business day after the payment was made.
 - (6) In no event must a REP fail to send a reconnection notice within 48 hours after the customer's satisfactory correction of the reasons for disconnection as specified in the disconnection notice.
- (o) **Electric service disconnection of a non-submetered master metered multifamily property.**
- (1) In this subsection, "non-submetered master metered multifamily property" means an apartment, a leased or owner-occupied condominium, or one or more buildings containing at least 10 dwellings that receive electric utility service that is master metered but not submetered.
 - (2) A REP must send a written notice of service disconnection to a municipality before authorizing disconnection of service to a non-submetered master metered multifamily property for nonpayment if:
 - (A) the property is located in the municipality; and
 - (B) the municipality establishes an authorized representative to receive the notice as described by paragraph (3) of this subsection.
 - (3) No later than January 1st of every year, a municipality wishing to receive notice of disconnection of electric service to a non-submetered master metered multifamily property must provide the commission with the contact information for the municipality's authorized representative referenced by paragraph (2) of this subsection by submitting that person's name, title, direct mailing address, telephone number, and email address in a P.U.C. Project Number to be established annually for that purpose. The email address provided by the municipality may be for a general mailbox accessible by the authorized representative established for the purpose of receiving such notices.
 - (4) After January 1st, but no later than January 15th of every year, the commission must post on its public website the contact information received from every municipality pursuant to paragraph (3) of this subsection. The contact information posted by the commission must remain in effect during the subsequent 12-month period of February 1 through January 31 for the purpose of the written notice of disconnection required by paragraph (2) of this subsection.
 - (5) The retail electric provider must email the written notice required by this subsection to the municipality's authorized representative not later than the 10th day before the date electric service is scheduled for disconnection. Additional notice may be provided by third-party commercial carrier delivery or certified mail.
 - (6) The customer safeguards provided by this subchapter are in addition to safeguards provided by other law or agency rules.
 - (7) This subsection does not prohibit a municipality or the commission from adopting customer safeguards that exceed the safeguards provided by this chapter.