

COVID-19 CPUC Emergency Customer Protections

Emergency Customer Protection Order

In response to the Governor's State of Emergency California Public Utilities Commission has ordered emergency protections for residential and small business utility customers receiving electricity, gas, water, sewer, and telecommunications services that are under the CPUC's jurisdiction.

Who qualifies for Emergency Protections?

All residential and small business customers of the utilities regulated by the CPUC are protected. This includes large energy utilities like PG&E, SCE, SoCalGas, SDG&E, as well as smaller ones; telecommunications companies such as AT&T, Spring, Verizon, and Frontier; and privately-owned water and sewer utilities under CPUC regulation.

Protections for Electricity & Gas Customers

Electric and gas utilities such as PG&E, SCE, SoCalGas and SDG&E are required to:

- Suspend disconnections for non-payment.
- Waive deposits and late fees.
- Provide payment plans for customers with a first payment of no more than 20% of the total balance and the remaining payments spread equally over at least 12 months.
- Eliminate income verification for customers who self-certify their eligibility and suspend renewal requirements for the CARE and FERA discounted rate programs.

Protections for Water Customers

- Waive reconnection fees and suspend deposits.
- Provide reasonable payment plans.
- Minimize disconnections for non-payment.

Customers who are serviced by a municipal water company are not covered by these protections.

Support for Telecom Customers

On January 4, 2021 the CPUC took action to support struggling families during the COVID-19 pandemic by implementing a telecom disconnection moratorium. The moratorium went into effect on January 16, 2021 and will stay in effect for 90 days through April 16, 2021. Here's what you need to know:

- Prohibits disconnections for non-payment
- Disallows charging of late fees
- Provides support for residential and small business customers
- Customers self-certify financial hardship
- Applies to wireline, wireless and VOIP voice service customers
- Does NOT apply to prepaid wireless phone service or broadband
- Carriers are required to offer payment plans to customers for arrears owed once the moratorium is lifted

The CPUC has the authority to extend this moratorium beyond April 16, 2021.

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| AT&T | 1-800-331-0500 |
| Sprint | 1-888-211-4727 |
| T-Mobile | 1-800-937-8997 |
| Verizon | 1-800-922-0204 |
| Frontier | 1-800-921-8101 |

How Can I Apply for Financial Support?

You may be eligible for discounted utility rates based on your current income (not your income before COVID-19!) through the CARE or FERA programs. You may also be eligible for rate relief through the Medical Baseline program due to a qualifying medical condition. To apply for these programs or learn about other sources of emergency financial assistance during the COVID-19 emergency, contact your utility company.

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|------------------|----------------|
| PG&E | 1-800-743-5000 |
| SCE | 1-800-655-4555 |
| SoCalGas | 1-800-427-2200 |
| SDG&E | 1-800-411-7343 |

Frequently Asked Questions

What should I do if I recently lost my job or can't work due to illness during the COVID-19 pandemic?

If you have a serious medical condition or have recently lost your job due to COVID-19 consider taking these steps:

- 1) Call your energy, communications, and water companies to let them know your situation so that your account can be flagged for program support.
- 2) Request a payment arrangement that would be affordable for you from your utility company if you cannot pay your bill in full.
- 3) Apply for CARE, FERA, and/or Lifeline if you qualify based on your *current* income (not your pre-COVID-19 income).
- 4) Apply for Medical Baseline if you have an illness or condition that causes you to use more electricity to maintain your health.
- 5) Make your full payments on your bill if you have the ability to do so. The shutoff protections will not last forever.
- 6) Review income guidelines for CARE and FERA <https://www.cpuc.ca.gov/lowincomerates/> and Lifeline before applying. Income eligibility will not be waived during this time and proof of income eligibility may be required in the future.

Will I be kicked off of CARE or FERA if I do not submit documents or information?

No one will be kicked off of CARE or FERA during the period when the emergency order is in effect. However, if your income increases, you may no longer qualify, and you should notify your utility.

How long will the Emergency Order Last?

The Emergency Customer Protections order is in effect from March 4, 2020 through June 30, 2021. The CPUC has the authority to extend this order beyond that date.

What is a reasonable payment plan if I have low or no income?

A reasonable payment plan is one you can afford to pay while maintaining your other life necessities.

The electric and gas utilities have been directed to offer payment plans that require no more than 20% of your total bill in the first installment and up to 12 months to pay the balance.

If this amount is not affordable to you because of lack of income, ask for a lower down payment and more months to pay your balance. Tell your utility what you can afford.

Exercise Your Rights

If you are denied service or assistance, believe you have been overbilled, or need help negotiating a payment plan that fits your budget, you have the right to file a complaint with the CPUC at: <https://appsssl.cpuc.ca.gov/cpucapplication/> or call the CPUC hotline at: 1-800-649-7570.

However, it is important that you first contact the utility company to try to resolve any complaints.

For more information visit our website at www.turn.org or contact cpierre@turn.org.

