



THE UTILITY REFORM NETWORK

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Guide for Know Your Rights Training Manual

# End Shutoffs Training Guide

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# 1

## What is a complaint?

When a person comes to you with a specific and identifiable problem.

For example:

My bill is too high and I was shut off! You interview the person, review the bills and find out that the person:

- Tried to negotiate with their utility company and did not get an affordable payment plan.
- Tried to negotiate with their utility company and was not offered a payment plan at all.
- Was dropped from the CARE program.
- Should be enrolled in CARE, FERA or Medical Baseline.
- Found out that the bill was not correct.

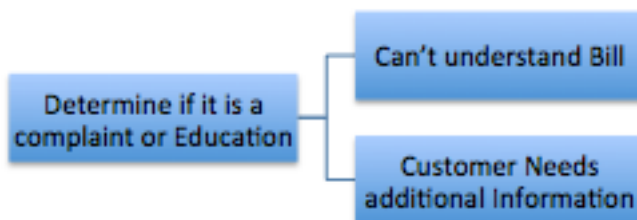
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## When is it not a complaint?

Sometimes a person thinks they have a complaint but the problem is due to a lack of information or understanding. For Example:

My bill is too high! After talking to the person and reviewing the bill you may find:

- There was a recent rate increase, which means that the bills have gotten higher because we are being charged more for the electric or gas services.
- The tiered rate structure changed to a two-tiered rate structure so tier 1 customers are paying more for their electricity, even if they are on CARE
- They lost their CARE discount because they did not renew their eligibility.
- They lost their Medical Baseline because they did not renew their eligibility.
- The person thought they had a payment plan because they were paying whatever they could each month.
- They did not understand how to read the bill.



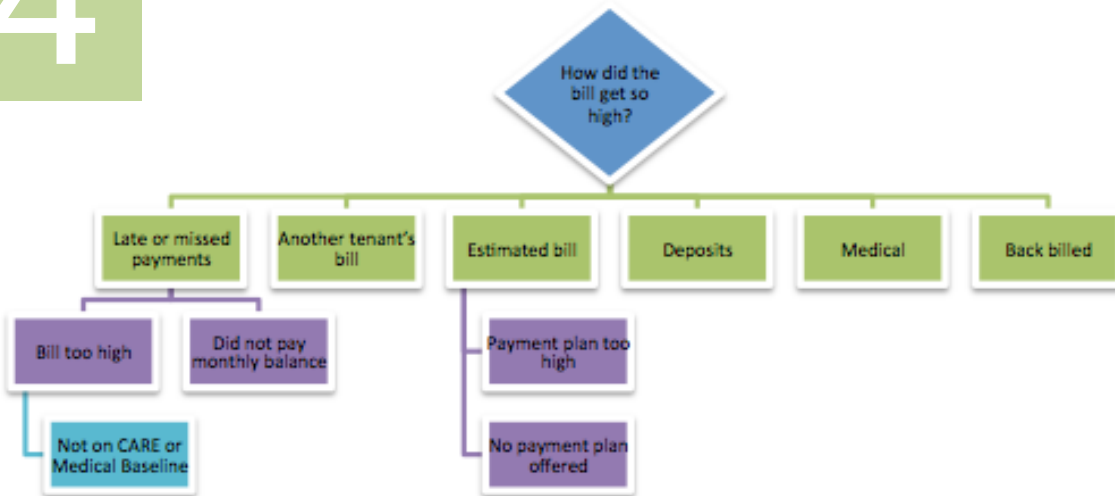
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## What are the most common reasons for a high bill?

- Late or missed payments
- Another tenant's bill
- Estimated bills
- Deposits
- Medical
- Back billed

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## How did the bill get so high?

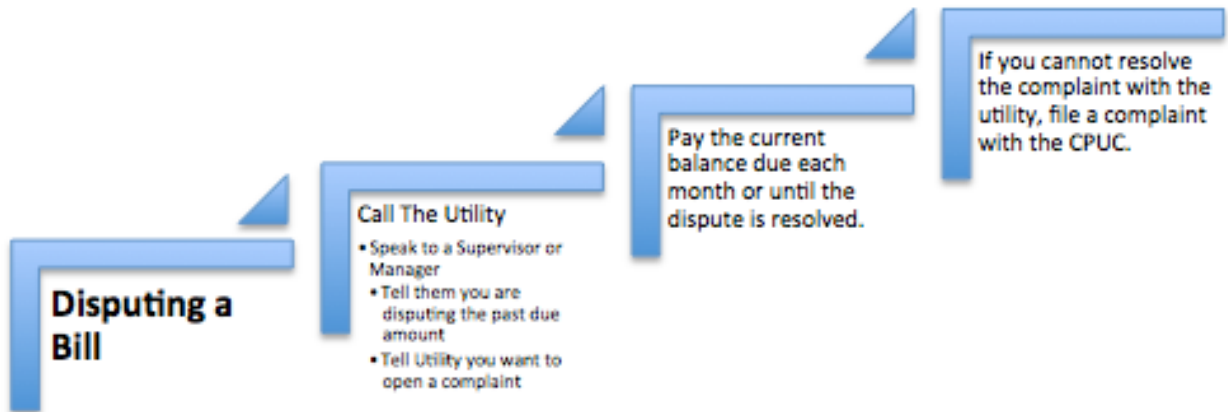


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## Avoiding a shutoff – Disputing a bill

Failure to follow the proper steps while disputing a bill can result in a shutoff. It is important to have the consumer contact their utility as soon as possible when you are disputing a bill. If you file a complaint with the utility the power cannot be shut off until the case has been closed. Appealing to the utility and/or the CPUC in an attempt to work something out may buy the customer some time and is always worth a try.

You should also make sure that any bills the customer receives after the disputed ones are paid in full (minus any disputed amount) and on time.

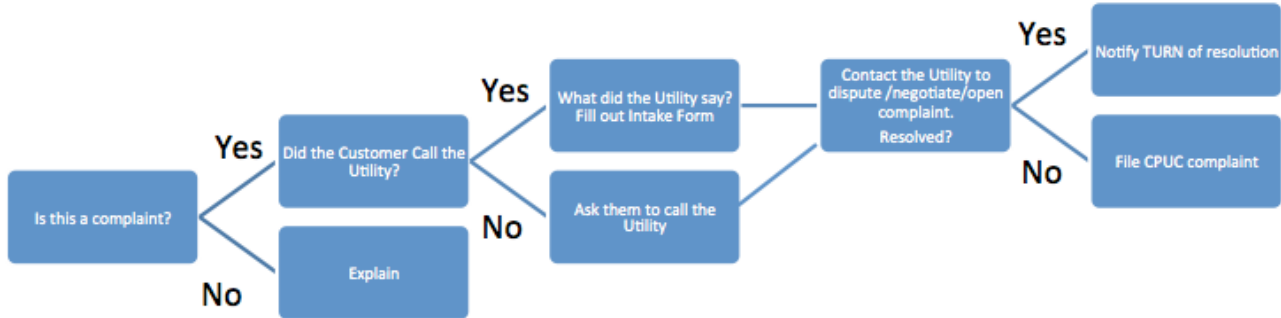


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## What are the steps I take if I am helping someone with a shutoff?

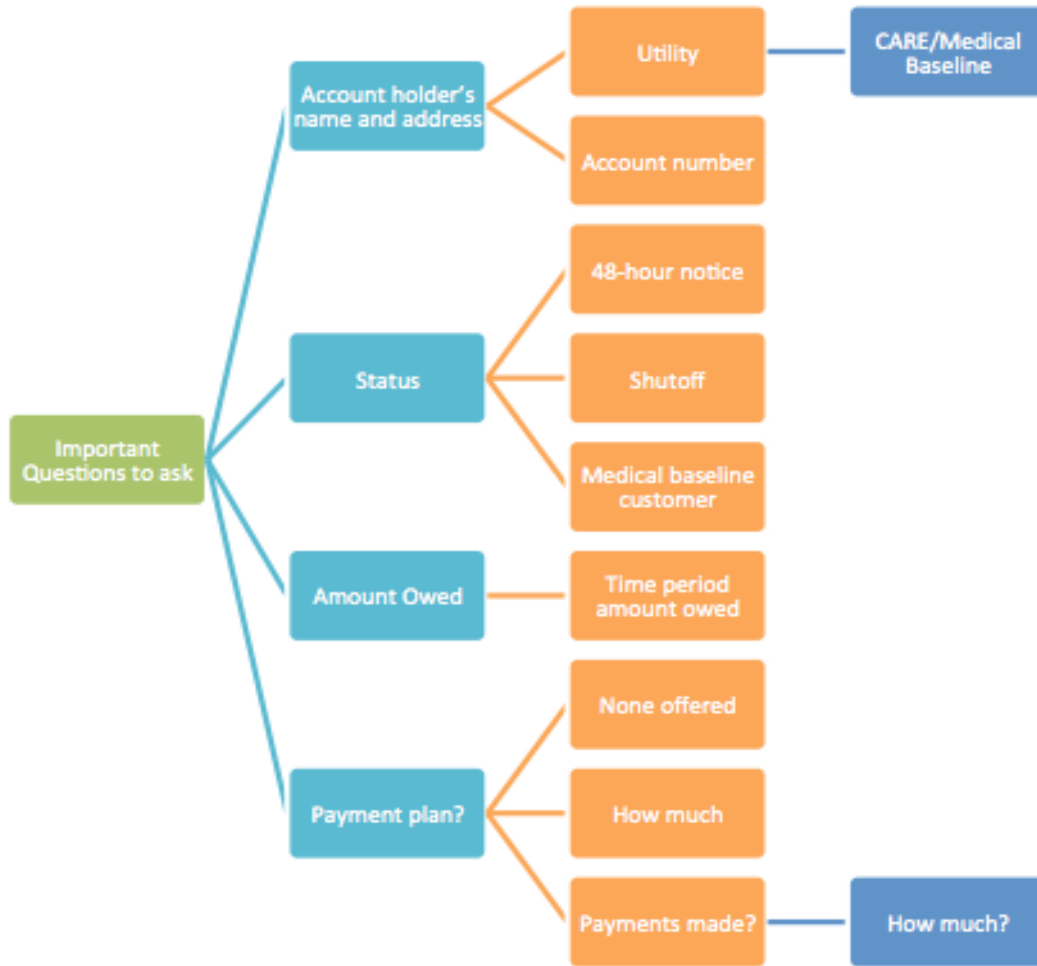
- The person must contact the utility. Find out if the person has contacted their utility and what the utility said to the person.
- Once you have collected all the necessary information, call the utility again and tell them that the person is disputing the amount and wants to file a complaint. This will buy you some time for the person facing the shutoff because the utility will not shut them off as long as there is an open complaint. Remind them that they must pay their current balance as well as the payment plan installments.
- If the utility won't work with you the final step is to contact the CPUC and file a complaint by calling the 800 number at: 1800-849-7570. The CPUC will transfer you to the Executive office and you will be able to talk to a Manager.
- Let TURN know that you have filed a complaint.

The Complaint Process for a Shutoff



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## Important questions to ask

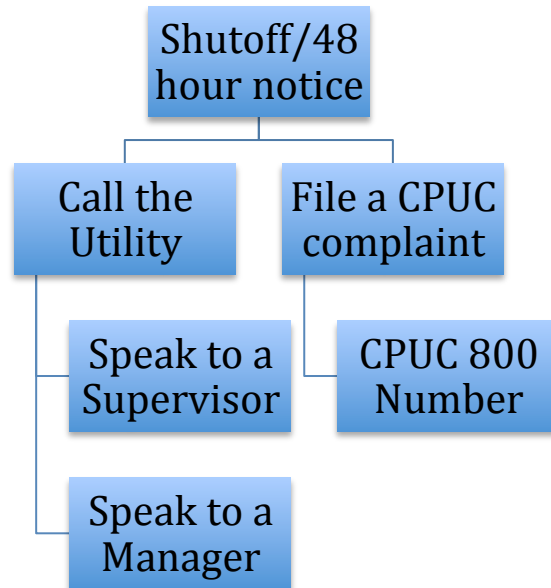


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## What is the complaint process?

The complaint process itself may not start until you have interviewed the person with the complaint. You may also need to document the complaint by asking the person to show you some of their bills or any documents that they have received from their utility company in order to figure out the complaint. Once you have gotten as much information as you can, you can begin the complaint process.

## Summary of the Complaint Process



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## Your tools

Shutoff Intake  
Fact Sheets  
Tariffs/Rules on utility websites

- Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E): <http://bit.ly/2h7xOeM>
- Southern California Edison (SCE): <http://on.sce.com/2hewvLv>
- San Diego Gas and Electric (SDG&E): <http://bit.ly/2gudkMA>
- Southern California Gas (SoCal Gas): <http://bit.ly/2hoiTOG>



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