

STATE OF NEW YORK

# Public Service Commission

Garry A. Brown, Chairman

Three Empire State Plaza, Albany, NY 12223  
Further Details: James Denn  
james\_denn@dps.state.ny.us | 518.474.7080  
<http://www.dps.state.ny.us>

10105

## **WINTER WEATHER SPECIAL PROTECTIONS NOW IN PLACE — Cold Weather Rules Safeguard, Protect Residential Utility Customers —**

Albany, NY—11/4/10—The New York State Public Service Commission (Commission) today reminded utility customers that procedures designed to protect residential customers of natural gas and electric utilities during the winter months began on November 1, 2010. These special rules — which provide residential energy customers with comprehensive protections in areas such as application for services, customer billing, and payment and complaint procedures — remain in effect through April 15, 2011.

“As we head into the cold weather season, we must make sure residential customers are kept as safe as possible,” said Commission Chairman Garry Brown. “The seasonal protections that are again in place are a well-established part of the process by which the Commission directly helps and protects residential energy customers in New York State.”

Under these winter weather rules, utilities are required to notify the customer or adult at the residence at least 72 hours before service is terminated, including making a personal visit to the residence, if necessary. In addition, the utility must notify the local department of social services if a resident is likely to suffer a serious impairment to health or safety if service is terminated.

There are added protections when a customer is known to be blind, disabled, or 62 or older and all remaining residents of household are 62 or older, or 18 years or younger, or blind. Customers suffering from a serious illness or medical condition may also qualify for additional protections. Certification by a medical doctor is necessary. Any customer who believes they qualify for added protections should contact their utility company.

All customers experiencing difficulty in paying their utility bills must be offered a deferred payment plan by their utility that is fair and equitable and considers the customer's financial circumstances. In some cases, customers may qualify for terms as low as \$10 per month toward their arrears. Utilities will also refer payment-troubled customers to payment assistance programs and/or the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP).

In addition to these protections, the Commission's Office of Consumer Services will take additional steps by asking utilities to renegotiate deferred payment agreements with payment-troubled customers, refrain from terminating service during periods of extremely severe weather, offering utility payment assistance programs and encourage the use of budget billing to make winter bills more manageable.

Consumer staff will also conduct a special review of complaints from customers facing potential disconnection to ensure utilities are offering every possible opportunity for assistance. In instances where staff finds that a customer's credit related complaint could have been handled differently, they direct the utility to work with the customer to obtain payment assistance or offer a new deferred payment agreement.

A full copy of these consumer protections can be found by going to the Commission's web site: [www.askPSC.com](http://www.askPSC.com) and clicking on the "Your Rights and Protections" link followed by the "Plain Language HEFPA rules" link or by contacting your local utility provider.

Consumers interested in filing a billing or service complaint with the Commission can call the toll-free HELPLINE at 1-800-342-3377 (8:30 am – 4:00 pm, Monday – Friday). Consumers threatened with residential electric or gas shutoff should call the Emergency HOTLINE at 1-800-342-3355 (7:30am – 7:30pm, Monday – Friday). Any consumer wanting to file a complaint or get information may visit the Commission's [www.askPSC.com](http://www.askPSC.com) web site.