

IUB Frequently Asked Questions for Disconnection of Utility Service order in SPU-2020-0003 Filed May 20, 2020

General

1. **Q: What does the IUB's May 20, 2020 order in [Docket No. SPU-2020-0003](#) mean with regard to disconnection of utility services?**

A: This order sets forth how electric, natural gas, and certain water utilities may proceed with service disconnections in light of easing COVID-19 public health restrictions within the State of Iowa.

2. **Q: Why did the Board issue this order?**

A: As Iowa begins transitioning from its pandemic response, utilities and customers need to begin addressing customer account and payment issues so that available funds can be directed toward those customers and utilities. This will allow all utilities to better assess their financial impacts.

The additional conditions and requirements in this order are so that there is a phase-in of disconnections and to give the customer the time to contact a community action agency, or other organization, to help pay a past due bill. In addition, the phase-in will allow customers who have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and who may not be familiar with the Board's disconnection process time to seek financial assistance or to enter into a payment agreement with the utility.

3. **Q: What are municipal, cooperative, and investor-owned Utilities?**

A: Municipals are local utility companies that are owned by cities. More information regarding municipal utilities in Iowa can be found on the [Iowa Association of Municipal Utilities webpage](#). Municipal electric and natural gas utilities are generally regulated by the IUB in matters of safety, payment agreements and disconnections. The IUB does not have oversight in matters such as rates, reconnection of service, and late fees. For more information, see [Iowa Code section 476.1B](#).

Rural electric cooperatives (RECs or Cooperatives) are owned by the people and businesses who are members of the cooperative. These are most common in rural areas of the state. More information regarding RECs in Iowa is available on the [Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives](#) webpage. Rural electric cooperatives (RECs) are

generally regulated by the IUB in matters of safety, payment agreements, and disconnections. The IUB does not have oversight in matters such as rates, reconnection of service, and late fees. For more information, see, [Iowa Code 476.1A](#).

Investor-owned utilities, commonly referred to as rate-regulated utilities, are owned by shareholders, or private investors that own shares of the company's stock.

Investor-owned utilities are regulated for rates and service by the IUB (see [Iowa Code 476](#)). There are five rate-regulated utilities in Iowa:

- [Black Hills/Iowa Gas Utility Company, LLC d/b/a Black Hills Energy](#) (natural gas only)
- [Interstate Power and Light Company \(Alliant Energy\)](#) (electric and natural gas)
- [Iowa American Water Company](#) (water only)
- [Liberty Utilities \(Midstates Natural Gas\) Corp d/b/a Liberty Utilities](#) (natural gas only)
- [MidAmerican Energy Company](#) (electric and natural gas)

4. Q: What is a community action agency?

A: Local community action agencies are organizations in Iowa designed to address issues facing low income customers in need of assistance and bring resources to the community level. Community action agencies take applications and distribute funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and emergency funding for utility payment assistance. You can find additional information on the agency's [website for your area](#) or [contact your local outreach office](#).

5. Q: What steps should I take if I cannot afford to pay my utility bill and need assistance?

A: If you haven't already, reach out to [your utility provider](#) and request confirmation of how much is owed to avoid disconnection and confirm whether you qualify for a payment agreement. Utilities are encouraged to offer additional payment options and may be willing to make accommodations based on your current circumstances.

The IUB recommends that you continue making reasonable efforts and pay as much as possible on your utility bills. If you are unable to come to a resolution with your utility, please contact your [local community action agency](#). Your community action agency is available to provide options for financial assistance in times of crisis.

If you are unable to reach a resolution with your utility and your local community action agency you may call or email the IUB. Though the IUB does not provide financial assistance, our office may be able to provide additional information regarding your options, and staff can work with utilities to help reach a resolution in many cases. You may contact the IUB by any of the following methods:

[Iowa Utilities Board Customer Service](#)

877.565.4450 (toll-free) or 515.725.7300 (Des Moines local)

Open 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday, except state holidays

customer@iub.iowa.gov

If you have a complaint about utility service and are unable to resolve the issue with your utility, you may [file a complaint](#) with the IUB.

6. Q: Which counties in Iowa are affected by this Order?

A: This order affects all 99 counties in Iowa. The order issues new guidance for municipal, cooperative, and investor-owned utilities to resume the process of disconnection of utility service on delinquent accounts.

Disconnection

7. Q: When can utilities begin to disconnect utility service?

A: Municipal and cooperative (REC) utilities providing electric and natural gas service may resume disconnection in all counties in the state of Iowa beginning on **Thursday, May 28, 2020**. The utility may resume disconnection subject to IUB disconnection rules outlined in Board rules 199 Iowa Administrative Code (IAC) [19.4](#) and [20.4](#). Specifically the utility must have:

- sent a bill for utility service; and
- the bill has not been paid in 20 days; and
- the utility must have sent a 12-day disconnection notice; and
- the utility must send an additional seven-day disconnection notice for disconnect to occur on **May 28, 2020** or later if the utility had previously sent a 12-day notice prior to **May 21, 2020**; and
- each utility has been asked to provide the local community action agency a list of customers that are subject to disconnection at the time the seven-day disconnection letters are sent to customers; and
- contact the customer by phone or door-hanger 48 hours before the date scheduled for disconnection if the utility had previously sent a 12-day notice prior to **May 21, 2020**. The telephone contact must be to a person in the residence and not to an answering machine; and
- offer the customer a payment agreement to customers eligible for payment agreements. For more information on payment agreements please see Board rules 199 IAC [19.4](#) and [20.4](#).
- An additional seven-day disconnection notice is not required if the utility has sent a 12-day notice after May 21, 2020.

If the utility has not sent a 12-day disconnection notice prior to **May 21, 2020**, it may begin sending 12-day disconnection notices on **Thursday May 21, 2020**. The utility may resume disconnection subject to IUB disconnection rules outlined in Board rules 199 IAC [19.4](#) and [20.4](#). The earliest the utility could disconnect in this situation is **June 2, 2020**, and the additional seven-day and 48-hour notices are not required.

Investor-owned utilities providing electric, natural gas, and water service may resume disconnection in all counties in the state of Iowa beginning on **Wednesday, July 1, 2020**. The utility may resume disconnection subject to IUB disconnection rules outlined in 199 IAC [19.4](#), [20.4](#), and [21.4](#). Specifically the utility must have:

- sent a bill for utility service; and
- the bill has not been paid in 20 days; and
- the utility must have sent a 12-day disconnection notice; and
- the utility must send an additional seven-day disconnection notice for disconnect to occur on **July 1, 2020** or later if the utility had previously sent a 12-day disconnection notice; and
- each utility has been asked to provide the local community action agency a list of customers that are subject to disconnection prior to at the time the seven-day disconnection letters are sent to customers; and
- contact the customer by phone or door-hanger 48 hours before the date scheduled for disconnection if the utility had previously sent a 12-day notice prior to **May 21, 2020**. The telephone contact must be to a person in the residence and not to an answering machine; and
- offer the customer a payment agreement to customers eligible for payment agreements. For more information on payment agreements please see Board rules 199 IAC [19.4](#) and [20.4](#) and [21.4](#).
- An additional seven-day disconnection notice is not required if the utility has sent a 12-day notice after July 1, 2020.

8. Q: When are Investor-owned utilities planning to begin disconnections of utility service?

A: Some investor-owned utilities providing electric and natural gas service have provided guidance regarding their plans to resume disconnection. For more information please see your utility's Customer Support Plan filed its respective M-dockets through the Board's Electronic Filing System.

- Mid American Energy Company (MidAmerican) [M-0150](#)
- Interstate Power and Light Company (IPL) [M-0156](#)
- Black Hills Iowa/Gas Utility Company, LLC d/b/a Black Hills Energy (Black Hills) [M-0225](#)

On **Wednesday, July 1 2020**, MidAmerican) and IPL plan to begin sending 12-day disconnection notices to customers.

On **Monday, July 13, 2020**, IPL plans to begin disconnections.

On **Thursday, July 16, 2020**, MidAmerican will begin personal contact attempts to delinquent account holders.

On **Friday, July 24, 2020**, MidAmerican will begin service disconnections.

On **Monday, July 27, 2020**, Black Hills Energy will begin sending 12-day disconnection notices to customers.

On **Monday, August 8, 2020**, Black Hills Energy will begin service disconnections.

9. Q: When does the additional seven-day disconnection notice apply?

A: The additional seven-day notice assumes that the utility sent out the 12-day disconnection notice prior to their respective disconnection date in the Order. If the utility did not previously send out the 12-day disconnection notice prior to their respective disconnection date, then the utility only needs to send the 12-day disconnect notice as required under Board rules 199 IAC [19.4](#) and [20.4](#).

10. Q: When can municipal utilities disconnect water service?

A: Municipal water utilities are not subject to the IUB's jurisdiction. Municipal water utilities may resume disconnection in accordance with their own policies. Municipal water utilities should work to ensure that all individuals have access to water. The actions of Iowa American Water and Des Moines Water Works can be referenced for examples of good public policy.

11. Q: When can rural water districts disconnect water service?

A: Rural water districts are not subject to the IUB's jurisdiction. Rural water districts may resume disconnection in accordance with their own policies.

12. Q: Can my service be disconnected if I have a property or properties under different utilities?

A: Municipal and cooperative utilities providing electric and natural gas service may resume disconnection on **May 28, 2020**. Investor-owned utilities providing electric, natural gas, and water may resume disconnection on **July 1, 2020**. If you are subject to

disconnection by multiple utilities, they may proceed with the disconnection with their respective timeline.

13. Q: Does anything in this order change if Governor Reynolds extends the State of Public Health Disaster Emergency?

A: No. The order sets forth timelines for when municipal, cooperative, and investor-owned utilities within the state of Iowa may resume disconnection. Municipal and cooperative utilities providing electric and natural gas service may resume disconnections on **May 28, 2020**. Investor-owned utilities providing electric, natural gas, and water may resume disconnections on **July 1, 2020**.

14. Q: If you are at risk of disconnection, may municipal and cooperative utilities providing electric and natural gas service disconnect on May 28, 2020?

A: Yes. Municipal and cooperative utilities providing electric and natural gas utilities may begin disconnection outlined in the IUB's May 20, 2020 order in [Docket No. SPU-2020-0003](#), which is explained in question 7 of this FAQ.

15. Q: If you are at risk of disconnection, may investor-owned utilities providing electric, natural gas, and water service utilities disconnect on July 1, 2020?

A: Yes. Investor-owned utilities providing electric and natural gas utilities may begin disconnection outlined in the IUB's May 20, 2020 order in [Docket No. SPU-2020-0003](#), which is explained in question 7 of this FAQ.

16. Q: Can I be disconnected from utility service overnight?

A: No. Your utility may only shut off service between 6 a.m. and 2 p.m., Monday through Friday. For more information, see Customer Rights and Responsibilities included in Board rules at 199 IAC [19.4](#), [20.4](#), and [21.4](#)

17. Q: Can I be disconnected from utility service on a weekend?

A: No. Your utility may only shut off service between 6 a.m. and 2 p.m., Monday through Friday. For more information, see Customer Rights and Responsibilities included in Board rules at 199 IAC [19.4](#), [20.4](#), and [21.4](#)

Moratorium

18. Q: When will the winter moratorium period in Iowa begin in 2020?

A: Limited financial heating assistance, weatherization assistance, and emergency assistance funding is available to income-eligible utility customers through the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). The annual application period runs from November 1 through April 30, in conjunction with the annual winter moratorium. The application period for homes with elderly or disabled residents begins October 1.

For assistance, utility customers may contact their local community action agency, or the Iowa Department of Human Rights online at humanrights.iowa.gov/dcaa/liheap or call 515.281.3861. Customers may also contact the IUB Customer Service staff at 877.565.4450 or customer@iub.iowa.gov.

Find more information on the IUB's LIHEAP webpage, iub.iowa.gov/liheap, or through the Iowa Department of Human Rights online at humanrights.iowa.gov/dcaa/liheap, or call 515.281.3861.

19. Q: When is the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) application period deadline?

A: The Iowa Department of Human Rights, Division of Community Action Agencies has extended the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) application deadline to **June 30, 2020**. For more information, visit IUB's LIHEAP webpage, iub.iowa.gov/liheap, or the Iowa Department of Human Rights online at humanrights.iowa.gov/dcaa/liheap or call 515.281.3861.

20. Q: What are Energy Crisis Emergency Payments?

A: Additional assistance is available through LIHEAP and the Energy Crisis Intervention Program (ECIP) administered by the Iowa Department of Human Rights. For additional information, customers may contact the IUB Customer Service staff at 877.565.4450 or customer@iub.iowa.gov and Iowa Department of Human Rights online at humanrights.iowa.gov/dcaa/liheap or call 515.281.3861.

Public Health

21. Q: What is required to apply for a 30-day medical extension?

A: The IUB suggests you contact your utility if you need a 30-day medical extension. You may also contact your doctor or a public health official and ask the doctor or health official to contact the utility and state that shutting off your utility service would pose a special health danger for a person living at your residence. The doctor or public health official must provide a written statement to the utility office within five days of when your

doctor or public health official notifies the utility of the health condition. For more information see [199 IAC 19.4\(15\)](#), [20.4\(15\)](#), and [21.4\(7\)](#).

22. Q: What can be done if you or a member of your household has tested positive for COVID-19 and is subject to disconnection?

A: In the event disconnection would present a serious danger to a customer or member of the household, a utility must postpone the disconnection for 30 days. The utility may require verification of the health condition, but is encouraged to accept verbal statements based on COVID-19 related health conditions.

23. Q: What can be done if you or a member of your household continues to be in quarantine for a positive COVID-19 test at the end of a 30-day extension?

A: The 30-day extension will be extended if the customer, or a person in the customer's household, is still under quarantine for COVID-19 at the end of the 30-day period.

24. Q: What should I do if you have a long-term medical condition which requires utility services?

A: The IUB suggests you contact your utility if you believe you have a long-term medical condition which requires utility services. You must also contact your doctor or a public health official and ask the doctor or health official to contact the utility and state that shutting off your utility service would pose a special health danger for a person living at your residence. The doctor or public health official must provide a written statement to the utility office within five days of when your doctor or public health official notifies the utility of the health condition. For more information see [199 IAC 19.4\(15\)](#), [20.4\(15\)](#), and [21.4\(7\)](#).

25. Q: What do I do if multiple individuals in a household have a long-term medical condition which requires utilities?

A: Households are only eligible for one 30-day extension. For more information see [199 IAC 19.4\(15\)](#), [20.4\(15\)](#), and [21.4\(7\)](#).