

HOW TO:

# RESEARCH UTILITY POLICIES



## WHY DO UTILITY SHUT OFF POLICIES MATTER?

Access to water, electricity, gas, and the internet are basic human rights integral to preserving the health and safety of everyone.

Unfortunately, millions of families each year are cut off from their utility services. According to the most recently available 2017 data from the U.S. Census Bureau, **1.2 million households (or approximately 1% of total households) experienced utility shut-offs** within the past three months of taking the survey, and 18.4 million households (or approximately 15% of total households) reported receiving notice within the past three months to have utilities shut off for missed payments. **Lacking access to these essential utility services disproportionately harm low-wealth communities, communities of color, and tribes.**

Fewer than half of all states and a handful of cities have imposed moratoria on shutoffs over various utilities. According to the Energy and Policy Institute and Food & Water Watch, some electricity and water providers have also voluntarily enacted moratoria on shutoffs, though the majority of the nation's 3,300 power utilities have not.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

**CHECK** [this](#) spreadsheet to see if your utility is already on the list

**RESEARCH** if not, research your utility shut off policies

**REPORT BACK** on your [utility shut off policies](#)

**TAKE ACTION** [urge the senate to stop utility shut offs](#)

## HOW TO RESEARCH YOUR UTILITIES SHUT OFF POLICIES:

- 1. REVIEW** the [utility shut off policy survey](#) to see what information is needed
  - Does the utility suspend service disconnections during certain months of the year?
  - Does the utility suspend service disconnections during certain weather?
  - Does the utility suspend service disconnections during specific days of the week?
  - Does the utility suspend service disconnections due to serious illness or financial hardship?
  - Does the utility suspend service disconnections for households with children or the elderly?
  - Does the utility suspend service disconnections when another party (i.e. a landlord) is responsible for paying for utilities?
  - Does the utility suspend service disconnections for households based on income and/or household size?
  - Did the utility suspend service disconnections during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- 2. WEBSITE RESEARCH**
  - Google your "utility company name" and "shut off policy" or "disconnection policy"
  - If you don't see any results that way, you can go to their main site and explore to see if you can find their policies.

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i. Here's an example of a state policy from Massachusetts:

If all residents of your home are age 65 and over, your electricity or gas cannot be shut off without permission from the Department of Public Utilities (DPU).

If you are experiencing financial hardship **and** one of the following applies, your electric or gas cannot be shut off without permission from the DPU:

- You, or someone in your home, is seriously ill;
- You have an infant under 12 months in your home;
- All adults in the home are age 65 or older **and** a minor child resides in the home;
- It is between November 15 and March 15 and the utility service is needed to heat your home.

o TIP: if the website has a search feature, search for "shut off"

### 3. **CALL** the utility office

- o If you can't find the information through the website, try calling them! Be sure to be friendly and share that you are looking for information as one of their customers.
- o If they don't know, ask if they can connect you to someone who would be able to provide that information for you.
- o If they don't have someone to connect you with on the phone, see if you can get the email for someone who might have the information.

### 4. **EMAIL** the utility office

If you can't get someone on the phone, you can try to email them the questions.

## WHAT TO DO NEXT:

### TAKE ACTION

- **URGE THE SENATE** to stop utility shut offs
- **ADVOCATE** for better policies at your utility. You could advocate directly to your utility board if you are an electric co-op member-owner or municipal utility customer-owner. If you get power from an investor owned/for-profit utility like most Americans, you could advocate to your state utility or public service commission.

Additional Resources:

- Minnesota's Cold Weather rule (scroll down) enacts additional customer protections from utility shutoff from October 15th to April 15th.
- Illinois example of Covid protections for utility customers
- Lights Out in the Cold by the NAACP is a great report on the impact of utility shut-offs with information on state policies.

**Thank you for being a part of making sure everyone has access to their basic human rights. If you have any questions, please reach out to [getinvolved@solarunitedneighbors.org](mailto:getinvolved@solarunitedneighbors.org)**