



# Quarterly Rules

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## Section 6

# Cold Weather Rule

## From the General Service and Telecommunications Providers Rules

Before taking a look at Rule 6.15., let's try and understand the myths and facts surrounding HYPOTHERMIA. Hypothermia is literally a drop in the body's internal temperature; it is a potentially fatal cold weather hazard for older Americans. This is not a disease, but rather a medical condition and often called the "silent killer", it is particularly difficult to diagnose because the symptoms are easily masked or mistaken for other medical conditions. Hypothermia, or low body temperature can be developed by anyone who is unprotected from the cold.

Some of the symptoms to look for are shivering, clumsiness or lack of coordination, slurred speech or mumbling, confusion or difficulty thinking, drowsiness or very low energy, apathy, or lack of concern about one's condition with a progressive loss of consciousness.

A person with hypothermia usually isn't aware of his or her condition, because the symptoms often begin gradually and because the confused thinking associated with hypothermia prevents self-awareness, but it is our older generation that is especially at risk, due to their reduced ability to respond in even mildly cold conditions. Their vulnerability is frequently complicated by multiple medications, poor circulation, decreased body fat, strokes and other disorders of the nervous system restricting the body's natural ability to maintain an acceptable internal temperature.

Thus the need for our Cold Weather Rule.  
So if you don't mind, I'd like to re-read the whole Rule.

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do so little.  
Together we  
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much.*  
HELEN KELLER

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## **Rule 6.15. Cold Weather Rule**

- A. Electric and gas utilities may not suspend residential service on a day when the National Weather Service forecasts that a temperature of 32 degrees Fahrenheit or lower will occur at any time during the following 24 hour period. The utility must obtain the most recent forecast for the customer's weather zone from the National Weather Service reports on the morning of the day that the customer's shut-off is scheduled.
- B. **Gas** utilities may not suspend residential gas service during the suspension moratorium period of November 1 to March 31 for low income customers subject to the following terms and conditions:
  1. The term "low income customers" is defined to include any individual gas utility customer of record who is approved to receive Food Stamps, WIC, TEA, Medicaid, or LIHEAP assistance.
  2. To avoid a suspension of gas service, such customer must directly notify the gas utility before the suspension date indicated on a received shut-off notice or before the receipt of a shut-off notice that they are approved to receive Food Stamps, WIC, TEA, Medicaid or LIHEAP assistance. Official written proof of such approval must be provided by such customer directly to the gas utility within fourteen (14) days of the date of the initial notice to the gas utility.
  3. Such customer must execute a written Suspension Moratorium Agreement ("SMA") with the gas utility obligating the customer to make a minimum monthly payment for gas service during the suspension moratorium period. Said minimum monthly payment shall be equal to the minimum monthly payment which otherwise would be required under the gas utility's approved voluntary "average monthly billing plan" or "levelized payment plan" , and shall be payable on the customers normal monthly payment due date.
  4. Such customer also must agree to and execute a Delayed Payment Agreement ("DPA") covering (a) the cumulative deferred monthly bill amounts for the period November 1 to march 31: as well as (b) any past due amounts owing at the time of the execution of the SMA. Such customer must timely pay the total deferred billing amounts in seven (7) equal monthly installment payments to be made April through October. Interest shall not begin to accrue on any deferred amount until repayment of the deferred amount begins. Payments under the DPA shall be in addition to the normal monthly billed amounts during the seven (7) month DPA term.
  5. In the event of misuse, fraud, or failure to make required

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monthly payments under the provisions of the Rule 6.15.B by such customer, the gas utility may initiate Commission approved service suspension procedures notwithstanding the provisions of Rule 6.15.B.5

6. In the event of a service suspension pursuant to the provisions of the Rule 6.15. B.5 such customer will not be allowed to again claim the service suspension moratorium protection of Rule 6.15.B. until all past due amounts owed to the gas utility have been paid in full.
7. If necessary to preserve and protect the public safety. The gas utility may initiate emergency suspension procedures notwithstanding the provisions of Rule 6.15. B until such time as the specific public safety issue has been satisfactorily resolved.

The Suspension Moratorium Agreement, or what we call "SMA", was added in 2005 in an effort to try and help our low income customers retain heat during a financially trying time of the year.

Unfortunately, the success rate of this program has not been as high as we would have hoped. The high percentage of customers who default while under this agreement is partly to blame. So many times a customer is only concerned with what will keep their service on today. They are not realizing that what they are promising to do today to maintain the service is an agreement that will also help the continued situation of tomorrow. It is because of this that I feel it is very important for you to insure that the customer understands what they are expected to do while under this SMA agreement.

So many customers just take it one day at a time and these are the very customers that need that extra customer service. In some ways it is much like the problems we run into with deferred payment arrangements.

And that leads me to what is soon to be known as my personal catch phrase and yet, "**Notes, notes, notes**" will once again be the key to insuring you have done your part in explaining! So many times we are told by your customer that they didn't have a clue what they had agreed to, yet when the company can provide clear notes that show the customer was in fact explained everything in detail... the ball goes back to the customer's court! .

So there we have it in one cold nutshell: The Cold Weather Rule and why we need one. As always, if there are ever any questions about any of our General Service Rules, please remember that you can call me anytime and I'm always more than happy to visit with you about situations and ways the Rules apply to them.

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## The melting pot of Rule information

**A few helpful bits of info from other rules:**

Just a heads up for those of you that I requested information on a deposit data request: I will be working on it into the new year, but have noticed that many of you tend to round numbers up rather than down. The Rule (4.02.) states that the total amount on deposit at any time shall not be more than the total of the customer's 2 highest bills during the last 12 months. Rounding up would not keep you in compliance with the Rule.

Last, but not least is the important information on the **Interest** that you will be charging on those deposits in 2010.

**Docket number 09-104-U was opened on September 29<sup>th</sup> and was heard Dec 1<sup>st</sup>. The order came down later that day and the amount will be 1.6%. So you will go from 2.8 to 1.6.**

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**That's all folks!**

**Except to say...Merry Christmas  
and Happy New Year from our  
office to yours!**

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