

Quarterly Rules



Consumer Services

Holly Tubbs
Manager
[501-682-5868](tel:501-682-5868)

Lesa Strange
Auditor
501-682-5867

Sonya Jones
Project Analyst
501-682-5863

Cindy Harris
Analyst
501-682-5430

Jane Gray-Todd
Sr. Representative
501-682-5988

Glenna Hooks
Representative
501-682-5701

Kathy Young
Representative
501-682-5862

Connie Moss
Representative
501-682-5719

Reba Barrow
Representative
501-682-5722

Barbara Hill
Secretary
501-682-5869

Toll-Free Line
1-800-482-1164
Fax
501-682-5882

Rule 6.18 GSR and 6.16 TPR

Elderly and **Individuals with Disabilities** (not **handicapped** anymore).

Act 98 of 2011 requires that the administrative rules of Arkansas state agencies use respectful language regarding a person with disabilities. The new law directed state agencies to make revisions to its rules to replace inappropriate terms with the terms outlined in the law.

Under Docket No. 11-174-R, Staff proposed changes to the GSR and TPR which will replace the inappropriate terms in those rules.

The order was issued on March 26th, approving staff's proposed changes. The revisions will be made to the GSR and TPR Rules as well as the definitions in front of those Rules. The PSC will not require the utilities to make changes to your tariffs at this time, but to use the new language as new tariffs are filed.



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Helen Keller



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So going forward, don't be surprised to hear state agencies saying "individuals with disabilities" rather than handicapped. I'm sure it will take us awhile to allow the new terminology to flow smoothly in our conversations, but we thought this might be a good time to explain the reason for the change.

As we have already discussed in an earlier newsletter, it is not an easy subject to bring into a conversation and yet there are some good benefits that a customer is allowed under this Rule.

Customers coded this way receive a few extra steps in the "shut-off" process as well as closer attention from the company during the heat of the season.

So let's take a look at our "Elderly and Individuals with Disabilities" Rule. It is Rule number 6.18 in the General Service Rules (GSR) and Rule number 6.16 in the Telecommunications Providers Rules (TPR)

The Rule only applies to residential customers.

A) Identification of the Elderly and Individuals with Disabilities for Registration

Utilities shall attempt to identify eligible individuals by informing them that a special program is available for customers who qualify under this Rule and shall then ask qualifying applicants or customers whether they wish to be registered as provided in this Rule:

- 1) When an applicant requests service;
- 2) When asked if there are options for elderly customers and customers who are Individuals with Disabilities; and
- 3) When contacted by a customer about suspension.

B. Customer Contact

At least 72 hours before suspending service to the account of an identified elderly or individual with disabilities, a utility must make 2 attempts at different times of day to contact the customer, an adult at the premises, or someone previously designated by the customer, either in person or by telephone.

- 1) If the attempt to contact is successful, the utility shall:
 - a. offer to explain to the customer, an adult at the premises, or someone previously designated by the customer, what can be done to avoid suspension; and,
 - b. offer to explain the payment and assistance options set out in Subsection C. of this Rule.

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- 2) If the attempt to make personal contact with the customer, an adult at the premises, or other designated individual is not successful, the utility must give 24 hours written notice, which explains what can be done to avoid suspension, before suspending service. If the utility delivers the notice to the premises, the utility must leave the notice in a conspicuous place where the notice is easy to see. If the utility mails the notice, the 24 hours begins 3 calendar days after the date the notice is postmarked. The utility must send the notice to the customer's address by first-class mail.

C. Payment and Assistance Options

When an identified elderly customer or customer who is an individual with disabilities tells a utility they cannot pay a bill on time, or upon contacting an identified elderly customer or customer who is an individual with disabilities under subsection B. of this Rule, the utility shall offer to:

- 1) Arrange a delayed payment agreement, or for electric and gas utilities, arrange for Levelized billing;
- 2) Explain the right to third party notice before suspension of service; and,

- 3) Provide the names of federal, state, and local bill payment assistance agencies.

D. Records

A utility shall mark the accounts of identified elderly customers or customers who are individuals with disabilities. Utilities shall keep a record as required by Rule 7.02. of how they handled overdue accounts of elderly customers and customers who are individuals with disabilities.

E. Hot Weather Protection

- 1) An electric or gas utility shall not suspend residential service to an elderly customer or customer who is an individual with disabilities on a day when the National Weather Service forecasts that a temperature of 95 degrees Fahrenheit or higher will occur at any time during the following 24-hour period.

For gas utilities, hot weather protection shall be limited to elderly or individuals with disabilities air conditioning customers only.



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- 2) The utility must obtain the 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.

F. False Information

If a customer gives false information to a utility to qualify as elderly or an individual with disabilities, the utility may suspend service under Rule 6.01.G.

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This Rule does not lay out precisely what is needed to provide the proof of either situation, but I think we can all agree that there are many ways to prove either one. Just remember, if the customer doesn't want to provide you with their Social Security number...they do not have to do this. There are many other ways to get the birthday of someone. Use the same policy for everyone and you will be fine.





# The Melting Pot

Heads up from my desk to yours

I am becoming increasingly concerned with the way in which some of you are back-billing for dead meters. There is a Rule that lays out how this must be done and in the past few months I've discovered many are in great need of revisiting Rule 5.19. I realize there are times when situations may warrant the need for consideration of doing something a bit different, but please make sure you can explain your actions if this is the case. Otherwise, you cannot go outside of this Rule. You must either use last year's usage from THE SAME customer at THE SAME location or use the class average if that customer was not at the location last year.

Also, I'm concerned with the front line giving answers to questions they don't really understand! They should NEVER answer a question with an educated guess. Remember, "I do not know" or "let me look into that" are acceptable answers.

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It only makes things worse when misinformation is given and we have to inform your customer that the information given was INCORRECT!

To make matters worse, some of you have service personnel in the field trying to answer billing questions. It is just best for all involved, especially the utility, if those who do not fully understand the problem or situation allow another who has more knowledge in that area the chance to answer the question. We realize there are times having the knowledge is not enough. Trust me; we know this first hand as we encounter the exact same problems. We simply allow another representative a chance at explaining the same thing, but in a different way.

Normally, a customer hearing it twice is all it takes, but if this is not the case be sure to note the account that two or more of you tried to explain. Sometimes it takes another department to explain those technical concerns, yet either way, insure the customer understands the facts and note the account! The customer might not be happy with the answers given, yet the notes will back you up! After all, it's the integrity of your company on the line, just as it is ours.

And in closing, let me just say

**That's All Folks!**