

QUARTERLY NEWS

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Rule 6.09

Suspension Procedures

Suspending service is never something any of us want to see happen, but service is a privilege and not a right, and it sometimes is necessary to follow these procedures. By the time a work order has been created to suspend a customer's service, the company has already had to follow many steps in notification. We realize that the bill not being paid in a timely manner is the ultimate cause of the hardship, but even then, there are Rules to follow to be evenhanded. Let's take a look at this Rule and then discuss the reasoning.

Rule 6.09 Suspension Procedures

A. Suspension Date and Time Requirements

(1) A utility may suspend service only during normal utility business office hours. However, no suspension shall occur during the last hour of the utility's normal business office hours

(2) A utility may not suspend service on a day, or on a day immediately before a day, when the utility does not have employees available who may authorize and reconnect service at the normal business day charge.



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Bernard Shaw

(3) If a utility issues more than 1 shut-off notice before suspending service, it may not suspend service before the close of business on the last day to pay as printed on the most recent shut-off notice unless Rule 6.04.B applies.

(4) A utility must suspend service within 30 days after the last day to pay as printed on the most recent shut-off notice, unless suspension is delayed under other Commission Rules, or the reason for the suspension has been eliminated.

B. Suspension Procedures at the Premises

(1) Utility employees shall not violate any state or federal laws or regulations in order to suspend service. Utility employees suspending service at a customer's premises shall identify themselves to the customer or any other adult at the premises and give the reason for being there.

If the customer offers to make a payment, the utility employee shall accept payment at that time. The utility employee shall also honor a receipt from the utility or a canceled check showing that the customer paid the bill. Utility employees may refuse payment in cash if they give the customer 24 hours to pay at the business office. The employee may refuse payment by check if the customer has given the utility 2 checks which were returned for reasons other than bank error within the last year.

- (2) If the customer or other adult is not at the premises or does not respond, the utility employee must leave a notice in a conspicuous place so that the notice is easy to see. The notice shall contain the following:
- a. a statement that service has been suspended
 - b. the reason for the suspension;
 - c. the address and telephone number where the customer may arrange to have service reconnected;
 - d. the amount past due;
 - e. any approved collection charge; and
 - f. the action and payment necessary before the utility will reconnect service

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This is a relatively small Rule, and yet it is packed full of procedures that can get you into trouble if not understood. As with any Rule, we have some key points that tend to set our radar in motion. Since it is not our goal to catch you breaking a Rule, let's take a look at some of those "things that make us go hmmm" about this Rule. The first thing we take notice of is the day in which a customer is telling us you shut them off.



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We listen for “what” day the shut off occurred. If it was on a Friday, be prepared to let us know if you have employees available to work reconnects on Saturday.

We also know because of this Rule that you won’t be doing the shut off on a day or on a day immediately before a day when the utility does not have employees available who can authorize and reconnect service at the normal business day charge. This Rule also states that you won’t be doing suspensions during the last business hour of the day. This is to allow the customer at least one hour to speak with a company representative about the situation before you close.

Smart meter accounts would be the exception as they were not in use when these rules were written. They are designed to be able to automatically turn service back on once the system shows the payment has been made. With that being said, it does appear that advancements in technology may put me out of a newsletter one day. In this case, smart meters would make compliance with this Rule quite easy.

Remember, our role is to help you avoid a mistake before it happens. We would much rather do this than have a problem that has to be fixed.

Also, remember there is another Rule that would dictate extra steps to be taken before a suspension. Rule 6.18 - “Elderly and Individuals with Disabilities” again dictates extra notification on accounts **previously coded as such.**

At least 72 hours before suspending service to an account coded this way, the utility must make 2 attempts at different times of the day to contact the customer, an adult at the premises, or someone previously designated by the customer, either in person or by telephone to ensure they know about the impending suspension. I believe the mindset behind this Rule was to help those who are older or in poor health keep up with their situation a bit better.

The majority of all suspensions start with a delinquent bill. One of the first questions we ask the customer is when the last payment on the account was made. We listen for a few of those warning signs we discussed earlier in this newsletter and try to determine if a call to you is warranted. Sometimes a bit of education is what is required. Most times we make the call to you anyway to ensure what the customer has said is correct and what options might be left for the customer. Some customers take ownership of the problem and for the most part just need someone to listen to them. Those are the times an education on the Rules is the only thing we can offer. Needless to say, sometimes it is welcomed and sometimes it is NOT!

This Rule also talks about accepting payment in the field. Unfortunately it has become very dangerous to do this, so many of you simply give the customer another 24 hours to pay the bill before coming back and we understand the reasoning behind that.



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# The Melting Pot

**OUR Newsletter will be scaling back to three times a year with the next newsletter arriving in January of 2018!**

Four times a year, for almost ten years, I've written about different General Service Rules. I tried to give clarification to the ones that seemed to bring the most confusion and even put one out in September, 2010 titled "Website Navigation" in an effort to help everyone feel more at ease in browsing around our state website.

I think it is time to scale back a bit, because there are only so many Rules to talk about! I realize some will need a refresher course from time to time as new employees come on board and different situations arise. The schedule for newsletters you will be getting going forward will be January, May & September. The next one will come out in January 2018.

In years past I've always used the December newsletter to inform every one of the Docket information about the upcoming interest rate on deposits for the next year. I will continue to send that information out in an e-mail to everyone as soon as the order has been issued as well as also include that information in the January Newsletter.

So if you are not familiar with roaming around our State website, please go back and re-read the September 2010 newsletter titled “Website Navigation”. It will help you get around and find our Consumer Services tab, which will lead you to all of the different newsletters and Rules covered over the years. Again, we will still be putting them out, but are scaling them back a bit.

And as I draw to an end of this newsletter, I notice that summer is slow in coming. Winter gave us all a break this year in Arkansas and with any luck summer will do the same, but just in case that is not to be, let’s make sure everyone is aware of the other Rule I have discussed in here. It’s the Hot Weather Rule for our Elderly and individuals with disabilities. You can find more information about this under Rule 6.18 or Volume 16 from the June, 2012 Newsletter on our web-site!

**That’s All Folks!**



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