



ICC Orders Consumer Protections Amid COVID-19 Outbreak

FACT SHEET

March 2020

What happened?

At the request of Gov. J.B. Pritzker and Attorney General Kwame Raoul, the Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) on Wednesday, March 18, issued protections for all customers of private, investor-owned utilities during the COVID-19 (Coronavirus disease) public health emergency.

What consumer protections?

The ICC required all private water, electric and natural gas utilities in Illinois to:

- Suspend service disconnections.
- Waive late-payment penalties.
- Implement temporary flexible credit and payment procedures to ensure all customers remain connected to essential utility service.

The ICC also directed all alternative electric and natural gas suppliers to suspend their door-to-door sales because of the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

How long will these protections be in place?

The moratorium on shut-offs and late fees will last until May 1, 2020, or until Gov. Pritzker announces the end of the COVID-19 state of public health emergency, should the emergency remain in effect past May 1. Revised credit and payment practices must be submitted to the ICC for approval and should be implemented for at least 6 months after the moratorium ends.

What exactly do the ICC directives mean?

Until further notice:

- Alternative electric and gas suppliers are barred from knocking on your door or conducting in-person marketing in your neighborhood.
- The state's private, regulated electric, gas and water utilities cannot terminate your service or charge you late-payment penalties/fees. That includes ComEd,

Peoples Gas, Nicor Gas, Ameren Illinois, MidAmerican, Illinois American and Aqua Illinois. These utilities must notify customers at risk of disconnection of these emergency shut-off protections.

- The utilities also must file revised, more consumer-friendly credit and payment-collection procedures for ICC approval. Once approved, the revised practices are to remain in effect for six months after the moratorium ends.

Note: These protections apply to all classes of utility customers.

Does this mean past-due bills will be forgiven?

No. Please remember that despite the moratorium, past-due bills will eventually have to be paid in full. The Citizens Utility Board (CUB), Illinois' nonprofit advocate for utility customers, recommends:

- All customers should continue to try to pay their bills in full and practice sound energy efficiency (be conservative with your usage).
- If you can't afford your bills because of financial hardship during this crisis, try to pay some amount each month and contact your utility to enter into a payment arrangement.

While there is a moratorium on shut-offs, your usage will still be recorded, your bills can still increase, and any debt you have with the utility can grow.

Also, on March 18, the ICC opened an inquiry to gather information on the affordability of utility service. Through this inquiry, regulators want to establish a uniform definition of "affordability" and "low income," and they want parties to submit comments 60 days after the end of the state of emergency. CUB will be involved in that inquiry to advocate for consumer interests.

If I think a company is violating the ICC directives, what should I do?

Call the ICC, 1-800-524-0795, or CUB, at 1-800-669-5556.