

October 2019

## Annual Notice to Residential Customers on Minnesota Cold Weather Rule

The following notice is for all City of Virginia, Public Utilities residential customers and is sent in compliance with the Minnesota Cold Weather Rule as enacted by the 1991 Minnesota Legislature, amended in 2001 and 2007.

The City of Virginia Public Utilities is required by law to notify all residential customers of the provisions of this Section of the law prior to October 15 of each year.

The Minnesota Cold Weather Rule is designed to protect people who may have trouble paying their utility bills in the winter. The Minnesota Cold Weather Rule applies from October 15 to April 15 of the year. **The Rule means that a municipal utility must not disconnect the utility service of a residential customer if the disconnection affects the primary heat source for the residential unit when certain conditions are met.**

### **Please read through the following information – Questions can be directed to the Utility by calling 218-748-7540**

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#### **Article 4 Consumer Protection, Section 2, [216B.097] Subdivision 1 [Application; Notice to Residential Customers.]**

- (a) A municipal utility or a cooperative electric association must not disconnect the utility service of a residential customer during the period between October 15 and April 15 if the disconnection affects the primary heat source for the residential unit when the following conditions are met:
1. The customer has declared inability to pay on forms provided by the utility. For the purpose of this clause, a customer that is receiving energy assistance is deemed to have demonstrated an inability to pay;
  2. The household income of the customer is at or below 50% of the state median income;
  3. Verification of income may be conducted by the local energy assistance provider or the utility, unless the customer is automatically eligible for protection against disconnection as a recipient of any form of public assistance, including energy assistance, that uses income eligibility in an amount at or below the income eligibility in clause (2);
  4. A customer who, at any time, enters into a payment schedule that considers the financial resources of the household and is reasonably current with payments under the schedule;
  5. The customer received referrals to energy assistance programs, weatherization, conservation, or other programs likely to reduce the customer's energy bills.
- (b) A municipal utility or a cooperative electric association must, between August 15 and October 15 of each year, notify all residential customers of the provisions of this section.

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If you have trouble paying your utility bill, you may qualify for state or federal fuel assistance. For complete qualifications and application information, contact your local county Social Services or Community / Citizen's Action Council. These organizations may also provide budget counseling. Some of the local energy assistance providers are:

Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency  
702 Third Avenue South  
Virginia, Minnesota 55792  
218-749-2912  
(Fuel Assistance Program & Assistance under other programs)

The Salvation Army  
507 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue West  
Virginia, Minnesota 55792  
218-741-1889

St. Louis County Social Services  
307 1<sup>st</sup> Street South  
Virginia, MN 55792  
218-471-7137

Legal Aid Service of Northeastern Mn.  
820 9<sup>th</sup> Street North, Suite 200  
Virginia, MN 55792  
218-749-3270

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Conservation is important to all of us – both the Utility and customers. Information on conservation measures are available through the Minnesota Department of Commerce, Energy Information Center by calling 1-800-657-3710 or by visiting their website at <http://mn.gov/commerce/industries/energy/>. Customers can also contact the AEOA Weatherization office at 218-749-2912.

**Payment Plans**

Customers who need to seek assistance under the Minnesota Cold Weather Rule can review payment options by contacting the Utility business office. The Virginia Public Utilities will attempt to work with customers in formulating a mutually agreeable payment plan.

In order to follow the Utility's Customer Service Policies and the guidelines set by the Minnesota Cold Weather Rule, customers will be required to make and sign a mutually agreeable payment agreement.

Before contacting the Utilities, be sure to review the rights and responsibilities for residential customers.

**CALL THE VIRGINIA PUBLIC UTILITIES AT 218-748-7540 FOR INFORMATION ON PAYMENT PLANS.**

**Your Right to Appeal**

A notice regarding your delinquent account may be appealed to the Virginia Public Utilities Commission at their regular meetings held at 3:30 p.m. the fourth Monday of each month (excluding holidays) at the Public Utilities Business Office, 618 2<sup>nd</sup> Street S, Virginia, MN.

**Third Party Notification**

If you have been served a notice of proposed disconnection by the Virginia Public Utilities, you may want to alert a third party (friend, relative, church group, or community agency) that a disconnection notice has been issued to you. The third party will not be responsible for payment of your bill. The third party does have the right to contact the Public Utilities to obtain and provide information on your account or work out a payment arrangement. Any payment arrangement must be signed by the customer (or customer's spouse).

If you want a third party to be notified of a potential disconnection, please obtain a Third Party Notification Form from our business office or on our website at [www.vpuc.com](http://www.vpuc.com).

**Your Rights and Your Responsibilities**

Remember that you have Rights under the Cold Weather Rule, but you also have Responsibilities. Further information can be obtained by contacting our business office or any of the local housing providers for information regarding these rights and responsibilities.

The Minnesota Legislature and Public Utilities Commission have issued the Cold Weather Rule. A utility must go through certain steps before disconnecting a customer's service. The rule applies from October 15 through April 15. The following information is to inform you of your rights and responsibilities under the Cold Weather Rule. These rights and responsibilities are designed to help you with winter utility bills. You must act PROMPTLY! If you choose not to assert your rights or choose not to enter into a mutually acceptable payment schedule, your service may be disconnected.

**The Cold Weather Rule provides you with these options:**

**THE RIGHT** to declare your inability to pay your utility bill. If you do so, you must enter into a payment schedule with the utility to maintain your utility service. You have the right to appeal any proposed disconnection to the utility. You will have to provide the utility proof that you are unable to pay and were current in payments to the utility. If you appeal a disconnection, your service will not be disconnected until the appeal is resolved. Appeals are resolved locally.

**THE RESPONSIBILITY**, if you choose to declare inability to pay, complete the Inability to Pay form provided by the utility. If you have proof that you are receiving any form of public assistance, you do not need to fill out the Inability to Pay Form. You must contact the utility to arrange a payment plan.

**THE RIGHT** to a mutually acceptable payment schedule with the utility. This payment schedule will cover your existing arrears plus the estimated usage during the payment schedule period. If you are able to pay but still wish to enter into a payment schedule, contact the utility immediately to arrange a schedule. (This payment schedule may be arranged by your designated third party and must be signed by customer or customer's spouse).

**THE RESPONSIBILITY** to make payments as agreed or promptly notify the utility why you cannot keep the agreement. You may then request that the original payment schedule be changed. Any change is initially subject to the utility's approval.

**THE RIGHT** to request that the utility notify a third party if your service becomes subject to disconnection. If you have requested third party notification, a copy of your late notices will be sent to the third party.

**THE RESPONSIBILITY** to receive budget counseling from a local energy assistance provider or other financial counseling organization. Local agencies providing this service have been listed above.