

## **BILL OF RIGHTS**

### **For Residential Customers of Natural Gas Utilities**

The South Carolina Office of Regulatory Staff (“ORS”) and Public Service Commission of South Carolina (“PSC”) want customers of natural gas utility companies to know their rights and responsibilities and whom to contact for assistance with questions or problems regarding regulated natural gas service. Regulated natural gas utilities include South Carolina Electric & Gas Company and Piedmont Natural Gas Company, Inc.

#### **BE AN INFORMED CUSTOMER. KNOW YOUR RIGHTS.**

- 1.** As a general rule, ***you have the right*** to establish natural gas service where available if you meet the following requirements: a) provide satisfactory identification and credit worthiness, b) provide necessary and reasonable access to your property, c) your utilization of the natural gas service does not pose a hazardous or dangerous condition, and d) there is already natural gas service in your area. If there are no natural gas lines near your home, you may or may not have the right to have the lines extended to serve you. If the lines are extended to serve you, you may be required to pay part of the cost of the extension. If you have any questions about your right to natural gas service, you should contact the natural gas company serving your area.
- 2.** ***You have the right*** to establish natural gas service if you satisfactorily establish your identity and credit and neither you nor any member of your household is indebted to the natural gas utility. You may be required to pay a deposit if any one of the following conditions exist: a) you have had two (2) consecutive 30-day arrears in the past twenty-four (24) months or more than two (2) non-consecutive 30-day arrears in the past twenty-four (24) months; b) you cannot furnish either an acceptable co-signer or guarantor, who is a customer of the same natural gas utility with good credit, within the State of South Carolina, to guarantee payment of unpaid bills up to the amount of the maximum deposit; c) your natural gas service has been terminated for non-payment or fraudulent use; or d) the utility determines, through use of commercially acceptable methods, that your credit and financial condition warrants a deposit. ***You have the right*** to have all conditions of obtaining service explained to you by the utility’s personnel.
- 3.** If you are required to make a deposit, the maximum amount cannot exceed an amount equal to an estimated two (2) months (60 days) billing for a new customer or for an existing customer an amount equal to the total actual bills of the highest two (2) consecutive months based on the experience of the preceding twelve (12) months or for a portion of the year if the service is on a seasonal basis for an existing customer.
- 4.** If you make a deposit with the utility, ***you have the right*** to have the deposit returned after two (2) years unless you have had two (2) consecutive 30-day arrears in the past twenty-four (24) months or more than two (2) non-consecutive 30-day arrears in the past twenty-four (24) months or your service has been terminated for nonpayment or fraudulent use or you discontinue service with the natural gas utility. Deposits held longer than six (6) months accrue interest at a rate prescribed by the PSC.
- 5.** ***You have the right*** to avoid late payment fees if you pay your bill within twenty-five (25) days of the billing date shown on your natural gas bill for current monthly charges. A maximum of one and one-half percent (1½%) may be added to any unpaid balance not paid within twenty-five (25) days of the billing date to cover the cost of collection and carrying accounts in arrears.
- 6.** ***You have the right*** to written notice from your natural gas utility before your natural gas service is disconnected for non-payment. The notice will include information to contact the utility, the total amount owed, the date and amount of the last payment, and the date for payment or satisfactory payment arrangements for payment by installments.

7. **You have the right** to designate a third party (such as a friend, relative, or organization) who is willing to receive a copy of your service disconnection notice. This party may be able to help you arrange for payment to prevent having your service disconnected but is not obligated to pay your bill.
8. **You have the right** to defer service disconnection during the months of December through March by providing an authorized medical certificate to the natural gas utility at least three (3) days prior to service disconnection or to the utility's disconnection crew at the time of disconnection. The medical certificate application provided by the natural gas utility must be signed by a licensed physician stating that disconnection of service would be especially dangerous to your health or the health of a member of your household. The certificate must be signed by you stating that you are unable to pay by installments the amount of the charges due for your natural gas service. A certificate shall expire on the 31<sup>st</sup> day from the date of execution by the physician. Such certification may be renewed no more than three (3) times for an additional thirty (30) day period each. (*You have the responsibility to make a good faith effort to make payments for natural gas service rendered during the period of time covered by the medical certificate to prevent possible disconnection when the certificate expires. The medical certificate does not relieve you of your obligation to pay for natural gas service.*)
9. **You have the right**, prior to a scheduled disconnection of your service, to arrange with the natural gas utility for a deferred payment plan to make payment by installments if you can show that you are unable to pay the amount due. In this deferred payment plan, you must pay, in full, the installment payment and the current month's charges by the past due date. This deferred payment plan will require installment payments of not less than 1/6 of the arrears balance for a period not to exceed six (6) months. You are not eligible for another deferred payment plan if you currently are under a deferred payment plan. The utility may terminate service if you fail to meet the terms and conditions of such deferred payment plan.
10. If the natural gas utility has overcharged you as a result of a misapplied schedule, an error in reading the meter, a skipped meter reading, or any other human or machine error, **you have the right** to a credit or refund of the excess amount paid, not to exceed the applicable statute of limitations.
11. If the natural gas utility has undercharged you for any reason other than customer fraud or theft, **you have the right** to pay in equal installments the deficient amount resulting from the natural gas utility undercharging you. Undercharges not resulting from customer fraud or theft could occur as a result of a misapplied schedule, an error in reading the meter, a skipped meter reading, or any other human or machine error. The equal installment amount shall be added to the bill over the same number of billing periods during which you were undercharged.
12. **You have the right** to have the natural gas utility test the accuracy of the meter serving your residence if you suspect a malfunction. This test will be conducted, without charge, if requested more than twelve (12) months from the date of the meter installation or from the last date the meter was tested for accuracy. **You have the right** to be present or to appoint a representative to be present when the natural gas utility tests the meter. **You have the right** to be furnished with the results of the meter test. If an overcharge or undercharge occurred as a result of a fast or slow meter with an error in registration of more than two percent (2%), the bills will be increased or decreased accordingly for a period up to six (6) months.
13. **You have the right**, upon request, to receive assistance from the natural gas utility in selecting the most economical rate schedule applicable, information about the method of reading meters, and billing procedures.
14. **You have the right** to contact the natural gas utility at all hours in case of emergency or unscheduled interruptions in your natural gas service.

15. **You have the right** to have complaints promptly and thoroughly investigated by the natural gas utility.
16. **You have the right**, upon request, to review the written procedures the natural gas utility has established for service termination due to nonpayment for special needs account customers and for all residential customers during extreme hot or cold weather conditions. All gas utilities shall publish their procedures for termination of service on their websites.
17. If you need assistance with a complaint against your natural gas utility that you cannot resolve by dealing with the utility on your own, **you have the right** to call the ORS's Consumer Services Department. The Consumer Services Department will work with you and the natural gas utility in an effort to resolve your complaint. The ORS is located in Columbia and can be reached by calling toll free 1-800-922-1531 or local 803-737-5230 or online at [www.regulatorystaff.sc.gov](http://www.regulatorystaff.sc.gov).
18. If you are unable to resolve your complaint by working with the natural gas utility or with the ORS's Consumer Services Department, **you have the right** to file a formal complaint with the PSC and request a hearing. To file a complaint with the PSC, you should complete the PSC complaint form. This form is available at [www.psc.sc.gov](http://www.psc.sc.gov) and can be completed and submitted online. You may also request a copy of the complaint form, including instructions for completing the form, by contacting the PSC at 803-896-5100. If you choose to file a paper copy of your complaint with the PSC, submit it by: a) mailing it or hand delivering it to 101 Executive Center Drive, Suite 100, Columbia, South Carolina 29210; or b) faxing it to 803-896-5199.

The ORS and the PSC want to inform you of your rights and responsibilities as a consumer and the responsibilities of your natural gas utility. This statement provides you a summary of your rights as a customer of a regulated natural gas utility. Not all services provided by the natural gas utility are regulated. More detailed provisions are set out in law, commission rules and regulations, and the tariffs of the natural gas utility.