



KNOW YOUR RIGHTS – AVOIDING WATER AND UTILITY SHUTOFFS

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE BEHIND ON YOUR WATER PAYMENTS

- **Get Information from Your Water Provider:** California law prohibits most water providers from shutting off your water unless your bill is 60 days overdue. The water provider must contact you by phone or mail at least seven business days before your water is shut off, and must post their water-shutoff policy on their website. If they do not have a website, they must provide you a copy of the policy upon request.
- **Talk to Your Water Provider About a Payment Plan:** Water providers must make available an alternative payment plan before shutting off residential water service. You have a right to discuss options with your water provider to avoid a water shutoff. You can also go through an appeals process to challenge the water shutoff if you disagree with your water bill. Your water service cannot be stopped while you are in the appeals process. Information about the Water Shutoff Protection Act can be found [here](#) and [here](#). These requirements apply to most water providers in California. Some water providers also offer reduced rates to lower-income residents. Check with your provider to see if you can lower your monthly water bill.
- **Sign Up for Lower Water Bills:** Depending on your income, you may qualify for discounts on your water bill through the Low-Income Rate Assistance (LIRA) Program. Ask your water provider for more information. In addition, if you receive certain benefits such as CalFresh, Medi-Cal, SSI, general assistance, or other benefits, or if your income is less than 200% of the federal poverty level, your water provider must waive any interest charges you owe once every 12 months.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE BEHIND ON OTHER UTILITY PAYMENTS

- **Ask Your Utility Provider for a Payment Plan:** Most private utility companies must offer a payment plan that gives you more time to pay what you owe. Your power cannot be shut off once you agree to a payment plan, and must remain on if you are making timely payments. Click [here](#) for information about how the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) can help you negotiate a payment plan. If you and your utility company can't agree on a plan, you can [file a complaint with the CPUC](#). The company cannot shut off your electricity or gas during the CPUC complaint resolution process.

If you get your utilities from your city, county, or other local government – such as Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LA DWP) or Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD) – check with your utility provider about payment plan options.

- **Sign Up for Lower Gas and Electric Bills:** If you get your utilities from a private company, you may be eligible for discounts on your electric and gas bill, depending on your income. [California's CARE program](#) provides discounts of up to 30-35% for electricity and 20% for natural gas. If you don't qualify for CARE because your income is slightly above the income limits, and you are a customer of PG&E, SDG&E, or Southern California Edison, you may be eligible for the [Family Electric Rate Assistance program](#), which offers an 18% discount on electricity bills.

If you get your gas and electricity from a city, county, or other local government provider, call the number on your bill or visit your provider's website to learn about monthly discounts for lower-income families.



- **Get One-Time Payment Help for a Gas or Electric Bill:** Lower-income residents may be eligible for a one-time payment to help with heating or cooling costs. For this program, it does not matter what type of utility provides your power. Click [here](#) to find out more about the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).
- **Additional Protections for Life-Threatening Situations:** If an electricity shutoff would be life threatening for you, contact your provider immediately. You may have additional options, and your provider may arrange an in-person visit to try to resolve the situation before shutting off your power.

TIPS FOR TENANTS

- **Know Your Rights as a Tenant:** Landlords can never shut off the water, electricity, heat, gas, or other utilities to force you out of your rental home or evict you without a court order. Click [here](#) to learn more about your rights as a tenant in California.
- **Avoid Water Shutoff if Your Landlord Has Not Paid the Bill:** For tenants with individually metered service, [California law](#) gives you the right to transfer the water bill to your own name if your landlord pays the water bill but is behind on payments. Your water provider must give you an opportunity to become a customer to avoid a water shutoff at least 10 days before shutting off water service. If you transfer water service to your own name, you will not be responsible for your landlord's unpaid balance, but you will be responsible for paying the water bill in the future. Tenants who share a single water meter may be able to continue water service if they can all agree to be responsible for the water bill and meet the water provider's requirements.

WHERE TO GO FOR MORE HELP

- **Get Financial Help from a Nonprofit or Government Program in Your Area:** In addition to the government programs and resources mentioned above, if you are suffering a financial hardship, a social service organization, religious organization, or government agency in your city or county may be able to help with your bills, depending on your eligibility. [Your local legal aid office](#) may be able to refer you to the appropriate organization in your area. You can also click [here](#) for a list of social service agencies in each county.
- If you try these steps, and they don't work, get help. To find a free or low-cost legal aid office near where you live, visit [LawHelpCA.org](#). If you do not qualify for legal aid, you may also obtain a referral to a certified lawyer referral service by contacting the [California State Bar](#).
- To notify the Attorney General's Office of violations, visit [oag.ca.gov/report](#). Although the Attorney General's Office cannot represent or provide legal advice to individuals, complaints from concerned Californians are critical to developing information about patterns and practices that Californians are facing statewide.
- If you have a complaint about a water shutoff or an investor-owned utility you can also contact your [State Water Board](#) or the [California Public Utilities Commission](#), respectively.