

Frequently Asked Questions for Residential Electric Consumers

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BILLING

Q. Why can't I choose my bill due date?

A. The utility companies read many thousands of meters each month. To do this efficiently, a cycle system is used under which some meters are read (and some accounts billed) each working day. This means your meter will be read (and, a bill rendered shortly thereafter) about the same time each month, with the date determined by your location. The exact date may vary slightly each month based on holidays, weekends, and other events (such as severe weather) that may affect meter reading efforts.

The utilities billing systems are designed to bill accounts according to the date meters are read. Meter readings are scheduled according to location and the most cost-effective routing of resources.

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Q. Does the electrical utility read my meter?

A. Yes. In accordance with [Commission Regulation 103-321](#), meters shall be read and bills rendered on a monthly basis not less than twenty-eight days or more than thirty-four days, absent extenuating circumstances. In no instance will more than one estimated bill be rendered within a 60 days period unless agreed to by the customer ([Commission Regulation 103-339](#)). To view these regulations, click on the links provided.

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Q. What is an AMR or MMR meter?

A. AMR stands for Automated Meter Reading; MMR stands for Mobile Meter Reading. Many utilities are converting from traditional electromechanical meters with rotating disks and dials to digital, solid-state meters that allow for the collection of meter readings using wireless communication. Some of these new meters automatically collect readings and transmit them over secure air waves to the utility. Other utilities utilize meters that are read by driving or walking near meters that have been outfitted with a device that transmits readings via a secure

radio frequency. Once the information is collected, it is transferred to the utility's billing department, where the unique transmitter ID and reading are matched to your account number.

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Q. Why doesn't the meter reader come to my house any longer?

A. As described above, many utilities are now utilizing AMR or MMR meters that transmit meter readings via a secure radio frequency, enabling utilities to gather meter reading data without having to access your property each month. Once the information is collected, it is transferred to the utility's billing department, where the unique transmitter ID and reading are matched to your account number. Your meter is still being read, but in a new way.

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Q. How can I use electricity when I am not at home?

A. Whether you are home or not, appliances such as your refrigerator, electric water heater, air conditioner or electric heat use electricity unless you turn them off when you are gone. Remote control appliances continue to use electricity in the "off" position unless the power to the appliance is disconnected.

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Q. What can I do to try to lower my bill?

A. To lower a utility bill you must use less energy or kWh (kilowatt hours). Some easy ways to use less energy are to turn off the lights and ceiling fans when leaving a room, set your thermostat at a slightly higher temperature in the summer or a slightly lower temperature in the winter, reduce hot water use with short showers and wash clothes in warm or cold water, use compact fluorescent (CFL) bulbs instead of traditional light bulbs, and unplug phone chargers when not in use. The largest energy users in the home are heating and air conditioning followed by water heating.

Below you will find helpful links to various energy saving tips sites and a brochure provided by ORS.

General

<http://www.energy.gov/energytips.htm>

<http://www.energystar.gov/>

<http://www.energysavers.gov/>

<http://www.regulatorystaff.sc.gov/consumersvces/savingenergy.pdf>

Duke Energy

<http://www.duke-energy.com/south-carolina/savings/lower-your-bill.asp>

Progress Energy

<http://progress-energy.com/custservice/carres/billtoolkit/step1.asp>

SCE&G

<http://www.sceg.com/en/faq/manage-my-energy-costs/can-sceg-help-me-make-my-home-more-energy-efficient.htm>

<http://www.sceg.com/en/faq/manage-my-energy-costs/is-there-a-way-to-analyze-how-im-using-energy.htm>

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RATES

Q. Who approves the rate charges for electric service?

A. The Commission approves the retail rates charged by an investor owned electrical utility. The Commission does not approve retail rates for Electric Membership Corporations, the Public Service Authority (“Santee Cooper”), or municipal electric systems.

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Q. Which investor owned electric utilities are regulated by the Commission?

A. Duke Energy Carolinas, LLC, Lockhart Power Company, Progress Energy Carolinas, Inc., and South Carolina Electric & Gas Company.

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Q. How are rates for these investor-owned utilities determined?

A. Rates are determined based on an analysis of all costs necessary to provide electric service to consumers in customer classes such as residential, commercial, or industrial. Each utility creates a Cost of Service Study. These studies allocate all costs that are necessary for the utility to provide services to all its customers. The revenue that each class provides is matched up to the cost of providing service to each class. Rates are then designed to generate revenues from each class to cover the costs of service for that class.

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Q. Who regulates Electric Membership Corporations or “co-ops”?

A. Electric cooperatives are primarily self-governing utility companies. The Commission and the Office of Regulatory Staff have limited jurisdiction, and become involved primarily when service territory issues are involved.

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Q. Why can't I switch to another electric utility?

A. In the 1960's the South Carolina General Assembly passed laws authorizing the Commission to assign an electric supplier to serve identified service areas outside municipal limits. These assigned service areas are shown on maps that were developed called territorial assignment maps. Basically, if a customer locates in an electric supplier's assigned area, the customer must be served by the electric supplier assigned by the Commission to that area unless the customer's premise straddles a territorial assignment border or is within 300 feet of another electric supplier's line if that line existed in the 1960's, in which case the customer can choose between the two suppliers. In those situations where customer choice was allowed and the customer made the choice of the electric supplier, it is a permanent choice unless the customer can prove his or her assigned provider is providing inadequate service. However, the electric supplier has the right to remedy the problems with the system. If they are unable to remedy the problem, after notice and a hearing, then the customer may, subject to Commission ruling, be allowed to change service providers.

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DEPOSITS

Q. Do I have to pay a deposit before I can obtain electric service?

A. The electrical utility may require a cash deposit to secure the account under certain conditions. [Commission Regulation 103-331](#) provides the conditions under which a deposit may be collected. To view this regulation, click on the link provided.

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Q. Why is the company charging me a deposit when I already have service and have trouble paying my bill?

A. Under the Commission's regulations, a utility may require any customer to make a deposit to guarantee payment of bills for service if:

1. The customer's payment record in the last 24 months shows two consecutive or more than two non-consecutive arrears.
2. The customer is unable to provide an acceptable guarantor to guarantee payment.
3. The customer has had his/her service terminated for non-payment or fraudulent use.

[Commission Regulation 103-331](#) provides more detail regarding the conditions under which a deposit may be collected.

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Q. How are deposits calculated?

A. According to [Commission Regulation 103-332](#), new customers may be required to pay a deposit up to an estimated two months (sixty days). For customers with a usage history, a

maximum deposit based on the highest two consecutive bills in the previous year or a portion of the previous year (if the bills are calculated on a seasonal basis), may be required. To view this regulation, click on the link provided.

All deposits may be subject to review based on the individual experiences of each customer, and the deposit amount required may be increased or decreased to reflect the customer's actual billing and payment habits.

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PAYMENTS

Q. When must I pay my bill?

A. Bills are due and payable when rendered, but residential customers have twenty-five days from the date of the bill in which to pay before the bill is considered past due.

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Q. If I cannot pay my bill before the past due date, can I get an extension of the due date?

A. Generally, yes. Utilities refer to this as a payment arrangement. Click on a tab below to get more information.

[Duke Energy Carolinas Customers](#)

[Progress Energy Carolinas Customers](#)

[SCE&G Customers](#)

If you expect to have difficulty in making timely full payment, contact Duke Energy to discuss options for payment arrangements at 1-800-777-9898.

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Q. What if I need more time than a payment arrangement to pay the balance on my account?

A. If the utility has noticed you for termination of service for nonpayment, you are eligible for a deferred payment plan, or DPP. In a DPP, the utility company may allow you to pay your past due balance in installments up to a maximum of 6 monthly payments. The customer must continue to pay the current billed charges. If the customer does not meet the agreed upon dates for payment of the installments, the utility may disconnect service after sending written notice. For more information, see [Commission Regulation 103-352\(c\)](#). If you are already on a DPP, the utility is not required to renegotiate the terms of that DPP, or to offer you an additional DPP until the first one is satisfied.

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Q. Are there any other options available?

A. Yes, click on a tab below to get more information.

[Duke Energy](#)

[Progress Energy](#)

[SCE&G](#)

The Equal Payment Plan (EPP) is a free service designed to remove seasonal variations in monthly bills. To be eligible for the EPP, you need to have a satisfactory payment record. Your monthly amount is based on an estimate of your annual (12 months) usage divided into 11 equal payments that you'll make each month. The twelfth month is used as a settle-up. In month twelve you will be billed or credited based upon the difference in your actual usage and what you have paid under EPP.

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Q. Who can I contact to get help to pay my bill?

A. Click on a tab below to get more information.

[Duke Energy Carolinas Customers](#)

[Progress Energy Carolinas Customers](#)

[SCE&G Customers](#)

There are local assistance agencies that may be able to help you pay your bill or provide other assistance. Call Duke Energy at 1-800-777-9898 for a list of agencies in your area. In addition to local and governmental funds, some agencies in the service area receive funds to help pay utility bills through the Duke Energy Carolinas' Share the Warmth Program. Duke Energy Carolinas accepts donations to this fund which are matched by the utility.

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TERMINATION OF SERVICE

Q. When can an electric utility terminate service?

A. [Commission Regulation 103-342](#) identifies the reasons for denial or discontinuance of service. (To view this regulation, click on the link provided.) Generally, service may be denied or discontinued:

- When there is a hazardous or dangerous condition;
- When there is unauthorized or fraudulent use;
- When the customer's use of service adversely affects service to other customers;
- For nonpayment of a bill in arrears at the current or another location;
- For misrepresentation of the customer's identity;
- For failure to permit the utility reasonable access to its equipment;

- If, at the time of application a household member has an outstanding bill;
- For failure to provide a deposit required by Commission Regulation 103-331; or
- For failure of the customer to fulfill his contractual obligations for service.

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Q. Is my electric supplier required to provide me notice before disconnecting service for non-payment?

A. Yes. [Commission Regulation 103-352](#) requires Commission-regulated utilities to provide at least 10 days notice prior to disconnection and a second notice a few days before service is actually disconnected.

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Q. Is it against state law to disconnect if there are children in the home?

A. No.

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Q. Can the utility disconnect service to residential customers for nonpayment during extreme hot or cold temperatures?

A. Each utility must establish written procedures for termination of service to residential customers for nonpayment during weather conditions marked by extremely cold or hot temperatures. These procedures vary amongst the electrical utilities.

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Q. Can the utility disconnect service to a residential customer when termination of service would be dangerous to the health of the customer or a member of the household?

A. [Commission Regulation 103-352](#) requires a utility to defer disconnection of residential service for non-payment of bills during months of December through March if a customer or a member of a customer's household provides a medical certificate completed by the customer and the customer's licensed healthcare provider.

- The healthcare provider must certify that the customer received a medical exam and that disconnection of electric service would be dangerous to the customer's health because of a medical condition.
- By completing this form, the customer certifies that he/she is unable to pay in full or by installment payments.
- The certificate is valid for thirty days and may be renewed up to 3 times for an additional 30 day period each.

The Medical Certificate does not mean that the customer no longer has to pay his/her bill. At the end of March, service may be disconnected if payment for service incurred during the December through March time period is not made.

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Q. Do the utilities offer a discounted rate for seniors?

A. No.

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TIME-OF-USE RATES

Q. What is a time-of-use rate?

A. A time-of-use rate is based on the concept that by reducing your electric use during peak periods (i.e. when utilities' cost of generation is highest), you have the opportunity to lower your annual energy costs – without reducing the overall amount of electricity you use.

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Q. Do the investor-owned electrical utilities offer residential time-of-use rates?

A. Yes. To view the time-of-use rates offered by your utility, click on the tab below:

[Duke Energy Carolinas Customers](#)

[Progress Energy Carolinas Customers](#)

[SCE&G Customers](#)

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TREE TRIMMING

Q. Why do electrical utilities trim trees?

A. A large percentage of power outages are caused by trees or limbs falling on overhead power lines. Tree trimming and vegetation management programs are maintenance activities that are critical to reliable utility operations and the rapid restoration of electric utility service after storms or other events. Post-storm reviews and investigations regarding system outages caused by heavy winds, snow, thunderstorms, tornadoes, hurricanes, and especially ice, have consistently resulted in recommendations to develop more comprehensive and focused vegetation management plans to improve reliability and customer service.

Please look at the [brochure](#) provided by ORS (Office of Regulatory Staff) for additional tree trimming information.

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Q. I'm concerned that a dead tree in my neighbor's yard may fall on a power line and interrupt my electric service. What should I do?

A. If you believe that a tree near a line needs the utility's attention call the customer service number of your utility.

Duke Energy Carolinas Customers – 1-800-777-9898

Progress Energy Carolinas Customers – 1-800-452-2777

SCE&G – 1-800-251-7234

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