



# CUBFacts<sub>General</sub>

## *Utility Do's and Don'ts*

Utility bills out of control? You're not alone! Below are some basic tips on how to manage utility costs and protect your rights as a consumer. For more information, see the resource list on the other side of this sheet.

### *Do's*

**DO** look at your bills. Keep an eye on your charges and call the utility whenever something doesn't make sense to you.

**DO** everything you can to prevent disconnection. Once you've been disconnected, you are no longer considered the utility's customer and it can demand full payment of the past due balance, a deposit, and a reconnection charge before turning your service back on.

**DO** keep your bills, especially your first and final bills from each address you've had. It pays to keep good records, just in case the utility tries to bill you again later!

**DO** be careful about signing up for gimmicky utility packages or services offered by alternative companies. Some of these plans are bad deals. Insist on getting details in writing and get all the facts from a trusted source before you sign up for anything.

### *Don'ts*

**DON'T** use your utility bill like you would a credit card! Unless you've set up a payment arrangement with your utility, the utility's billing system will be looking for the entire balance **EVERY MONTH**. The utility **CAN DISCONNECT YOU** if you do not pay the full balance.

**DON'T** forget that you can read your own meter! Your gas and electric bills will tell you what your most recent meter reading was, and whether it is based on an actual reading or an estimate. Check your meter yourself from time to time to make sure the utility hasn't made an error.

**DON'T** pay late too many times. If you pay late more than four times in a year, the utility may charge you a deposit without warning.

**DON'T** waste energy. Weatherize your home or apartment. Keep your heating and air-conditioning usage in check. It may also be worth it to replace old appliances with newer, more efficient ones. You can also save a lot of money by replacing old-fashioned incandescent light bulbs with ultra-efficient Compact Fluorescent Light bulbs (CFLs). They last up to 10 times longer and use only a quarter of the power to run.



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## Helpful Resources

### **Citizens Utility Board (CUB)**

1-800-669-5556

[www.citizensutilityboard.org](http://www.citizensutilityboard.org)

CUB is a non-profit consumer advocacy group that works on utility issues. If you ever have a question or complaint about your natural gas, electric, or phone bill, call CUB's free hotline and ask to speak to a counselor. CUB's staffers may be able to intervene with the utility on your behalf.

### **Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC)**

1-800-524-0795

[www.icc.illinois.gov](http://www.icc.illinois.gov)

The ICC is the state regulatory agency that oversees natural gas, electric, and telephone companies. Call the ICC if you have a dispute and/or want to register a complaint against any utility.

### **CEDA (for Chicago)**

1-800-571-2332

[www.cedaorg.net](http://www.cedaorg.net)

CEDA administers the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) in Cook County. Contact CEDA to find out if you qualify for financial assistance on your gas or light bill. CEDA may also have funds available for weatherizing your home.

### **Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) (for rest of Illinois)**

1-877-411-9276

[LiheapIllinois.com](http://LiheapIllinois.com)

LIHEAP, which is funded by the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human services, helps eligible low-income households pay for winter energy services.

### **City of Chicago**

311

Make the city work for you! Call 311 to get referred to the proper city department or agency.

### **Illinois Attorney General**

1-800-386-5438

[www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov](http://www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov)

Report instances of fraud to the Illinois Attorney General.

### **Lifeline/Link-up**

1-888-256-5378 for AT&T customers

1-800-483-4000 for Verizon customers

Low-income AT&T customers may qualify for a discount on their local bill. Call the number above to find out if you're eligible. If you're not an AT&T or Verizon customer, call your company to see if it offers these programs.

### **Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago**

1-312-341-1070

[www.LAFChicago.org](http://www.LAFChicago.org)

Provides free legal assistance to low-income and elderly individuals, helping them settle landlord-tenant utility issues.

### **Prairie State Legal Services (for rest of northern Illinois)**

To find an office near you, visit:

[www.pslegal.org/service%2520area.htm](http://www.pslegal.org/service%2520area.htm)

### **Land of Lincoln Legal Services (for southern Illinois)**

To find an office near you, visit:

[www.lollaf.org/office.html](http://www.lollaf.org/office.html)