

# **CUSTOMER SERVICE PROCEDURES**

## **Section 1**

### **APPLICATION PROVISIONS**

#### Application for Service

Services established are to be in the name of the legal occupant of the property, i.e. the owner, legal tenant, or a guardian or personal representative if the owner or tenant should be incapacitated. Any service set in the name(s) of a person(s) who becomes deceased is required to be changed to the name of the legal occupant of the property. Any service not corrected, after notification by the BPU, may be subject to disconnection. The application to request a service can be found in Appendix I – “Application for Service.”

#### Outstanding Utility Bills

The BPU may refuse making utility services available to anyone who has outstanding or delinquent utility accounts with the BPU.

## Section 2

### DEPOSIT PROVISIONS

#### Our Deposit Policy

The Hillsdale Board of Public Utilities deposit policy is designed to assess the credit risk associated with applications for new or continued service, while protecting the assets of our utility.

This policy is based upon the use of a technology-based screening tool called the ONLINE Utility Exchange to assess credit risk at the point of application and charge deposits only to those potential customers and existing customers who pose credit risk.

#### Deposit Criteria

The Hillsdale Board of Public Utilities shall consider the status of the applicant and the property for which service is requested and act according to the following criteria:

##### **New Account:**

If a property can be lienied as allowed by law, then no deposit will be required. However, ONLINE Utility Exchange will be used to verify identity.

If a property cannot be lienied as allowed by law:

1. Applicants who return no credit risk (returned by ONLINE Utility Exchange 0.0% to 10.0% risk), will pay no deposit amount; all other deposits will be as follows: (returned by ONLINE Utility Exchange 10.1% to 25.0% risk) will pay \$100, (returned by ONLINE Utility Exchange 25.1% to 50.0% risk) will pay \$175, (returned by ONLINE Utility Exchange 50.1% to 75.0% risk) will pay \$225, (returned by ONLINE Utility Exchange 75.1% to 100.0% risk) will pay \$400.

A service applicant who provides a social security number that is returned as deceased, non-issued, belonging to a person under the age of 18, or belonging to a person other than the applicant, or is fraudulent, shall be denied service until that person supplies a valid social security number.

2. Payment of any deposit is expected in full at the time of notification before the account can be established. Payment arrangements will not be accepted on deposits.

##### **Existing Account:**

Any existing customer who becomes delinquent and has had two or more disconnects in any consecutive 12-month period, shall be deemed to have an unsatisfactory payment record and

must pay a maximum deposit to continue service. The maximum deposit will be an amount equal to a 2-month average for service at that address.

Payment of any deposit is expected in full at the time of notification. Payment arrangements will not be accepted on deposits.

### **Deposit Duration**

Deposits may be credited to customer accounts after eighteen months if the account has been paid by the specified due dates and no penalties have been incurred, at the discretion of The Hillsdale Board of Public Utilities.

The Hillsdale Board of Public Utilities will refund a deposit upon discontinuance of service. The deposit will be applied against any outstanding balance for utility service and the remainder (if any) will be refunded to the Customer.

## Section 3

### **METER READING**

#### Utility Meters and Meter Readings

Utility service furnished to a property is measured by meters at that property for the electric, water, and sewer services. In the case of the sewer utility, the volume of water furnished to a property is the measure of the sewage discharged, unless the Customer secures a special meter after explicit BPU approval.

The meter is the property of the BPU, but in the care and custody of the Customer. The property owner and/or tenant are prohibited from removing, damaging, or tampering with the meter. A safe passageway must be maintained for meter access by the BPU. Additionally, the property owner and/or tenant have the responsibility to keep the meter free from obstructions by restraining pets, and/or by removing obstacles that the BPU might encounter at that property. The Customer shall permit only authorized agents of the BPU or other persons lawfully authorized to do so, to inspect, test or remove the same. If the meters or metering equipment are tampered with, damaged, or destroyed, the cost of discovery, investigation, unmetered usage and necessary repairs or replacements shall be paid by the customer.

The Customer has the responsibility to provide ready free access for meter readings if the meter is in a locked place. Failure of the Customer to provide ready free access may result in the termination of utility service until suitable access is provided. BPU personnel will be reasonably careful in operation, maintenance, removal and replacement of BPU owned equipment; however, it will be at the owner's expense and responsibility for moving inappropriate structures, shrubbery and landscaping and its replacement thereof, if the Customer-owned structures interfere with access or service by BPU personnel

Most water meters are located in the basement of residential property. As it deems necessary, the BPU may request access to the inside water meter for verification, testing, changing, etc.

Once each month, on approximately the same date, the BPU is scheduled to read the meters at the property. BPU employees carry identification, which the Customer may ask to see for their own protection. Though the BPU attempts to read the meters each month, there are occasions when the BPU may have to estimate the Customer's monthly bill. Situations such as extreme weather conditions, emergencies, or the inability of the BPU to gain access to the meters or other circumstances may prevent the BPU from taking a meter reading and require that the bill be estimated.

### Meter Accuracy

The BPU shall test the accuracy of all meters, as it deems necessary according to industry standards.

If the Customer requests a test at times other than those scheduled above, then the meter will be tested upon written request of the Customer. If the meter tests accurately according to industry standard (2% slow or fast), the Customer will be responsible for payment of the meter testing fee as set forth in Appendix II, "Schedule A – Fees and Charges." When a customer requests a meter test, they will be mailed a copy of the meter test results.

## Section 4

### **BILLING PROVISIONS**

#### Billing Accuracy

While the BPU strives to maintain accurate billing, various situations may arise that necessitates an account adjustment. Various billing situations are described below.

#### **Overcharges:**

- If the BPU overcharges a customer due to a billing error such as an incorrect billing code, incorrect reads, or an account not properly established, the BPU shall refund or credit the amount of the overcharge. No adjustment, refund or credit so made or given shall be for a period in excess of 24 months.
- If a meter tested is found to be more than 2% fast, the BPU shall refund to the Customer an amount equal to the excess charge for the utility metered for a period equal to the time elapsed since the previous test, but not to exceed 12 months.

#### **Undercharges:**

- If the BPU undercharges a customer due to a billing error such as an incorrect billing code, incorrect reads, or an account not properly established, the BPU shall back-bill the Customer for the amount of the estimated undercharge for a period not to exceed 12 months.
- If a meter tested is found to be more than 2% slow, the BPU shall make a charge to the Customer for the utility incorrectly metered for a period equal to the time elapsed since the previous test, but not to exceed 12 months.
- The BPU retains the right to issue an estimated bill for previous periods if a non-registering meter is detected.
- In cases that involve meter tampering or fraud, the BPU may backbill the Customer for the amount of the estimated undercharge.

Except in cases that involve meter tampering or fraud, the BPU shall offer the Customer reasonable payment arrangements for the amount of the backbill, taking into account the period of the undercharge.

### Billing Period and Estimated Bills

Bills for utility service are issued at intervals of approximately thirty days. This means that the Customer's bill is calculated and mailed on or about the same date each month. If the BPU was unable to obtain actual meter readings for a billing period, an estimated bill based on previous usage history (past meter readings) will be mailed.

Customers are to immediately contact the BPU Office if they have questions or complaints about a utility bill, at (517) 437-3387.

### Budget Billing

The budget billing plan levelizes the Customer's annual billing and is offered as a convenience for the BPU's customers. There is no extra cost to the customer under this billing program and the Customer ultimately pays for only the actual utilities that are used.

The monthly average payment amount will be based on one-twelfth of the actual usage over the most recent twelve months. The BPU may, at any time during the 12 month period, adjust the estimate to conform closer to the actual use of service being experienced. The normal equal payment period will be 12 months, commencing in any month selected by the BPU.

Budget billing is reviewed twice annually, in April and October.

If the actual service used during the budget plan period exceeds the bills as rendered, the amount of such excess will be added to the next 12 month budget period. If the actual service used during the budget plan is less than the amount paid, the overpayment will be credited to the Customer's next 12 month budget period. If the Customer discontinues service, the actual amount due or customer credit will be paid in full.

If a customer fails to pay bills as rendered under the budget plan, the BPU shall have the right to withdraw the plan with respect to such customer and to request immediate payment of any past due amounts.

The Customer must be on the automatic bill payment program in order to participate in budget billing.

### Automatic Bill Payment

Customers also have the option of applying for the automatic bill payment program. This program allows the Customer to have their utility bill deducted from their designated financial institution account on the billing due date. The Customer will still receive their

monthly billing information in the mail. The Customer can cancel this program at any time.

#### Service Fees

A new account fee as established in Appendix II, “Schedule A – Fees and Charges,” will be charged each time a new account is established.

Seasonal customers re-establishing electric, water, or wastewater services will also be billed a reconnection charge, as established in Appendix II, “Schedule A – Fees and Charges.”



## Section 5

### **DISPUTE PROVISIONS**

#### General

The BPU has established procedures which insures the prompt, efficient, and thorough receipt and investigation of all customer inquires, service requests, and complaints regarding utility services and charges thereof. All such requests must be submitted in written form.

The Customer may file, at any time, a complaint with the BPU concerning a utility bill or any other matter relating to the service. In addition to filing the complaint, the Customer may also request a personal conference with the employee at the BPU who has been designated and authorized to handle such complaints.

The written request must include, at a minimum, the Customer's name, service address, phone number, and general statement setting forth the nature of the complaint, inquiry or request.

The BPU will investigate each request promptly and thoroughly, and if requested, confer with the Customer. Following each investigation, the BPU will notify the customer of its findings and resolution of the matter.

#### Usage Concerns

When a customer indicates that they have concerns about their usage, the proper service order will be completed. Our service technicians will meet with the Customer and investigate. Often our employees may be able to find the source of the usage. Many times they cannot. While we always strive to assist customers and help them conserve, we cannot always provide them an answer regarding all of their use.

## **Section 6**

### **METER TAMPERING**

The BPU reserves the right to disconnect any service where, if after reasonable investigation, it determines that a customer has tampered with any metering equipment.

If after reasonable investigation, the BPU determines that a licensed electrician or plumber has tampered with any metering equipment without proper notice to the BPU, the electrician or plumber will be issued a warning with a copy to the appropriate licensing authority.

Nothing included in this section shall preclude the BPU from seeking criminal prosecution against the offender(s) involved.

## Section 7

### PAYMENT PROVISIONS

#### General

Utility bills will be issued at intervals of approximately thirty days. Final billings will be issued in a timely manner following the final read. All charges shall be payable in full at the BPU Office through and including the date shown on the bill rendered. However, two grace days shall be allowed before a late charge is assessed. **Failure to receive a bill shall not entitle a customer to an extension of time for payment or a waiver of the late charge.**

#### Pay in Person

The BPU has office hours from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Utility bills can be paid in person or mailed to the BPU Office, 45 Monroe Street. The BPU also has a night depository box that can be used to make payments which is located next to the front door at the BPU Office. Payments can also be made in person at Nash Drugs..

#### Pay by Mail

Payments can be made via mail, with a check or money sent to the following address:

Hillsdale Board of Public Utilities  
45 Monroe St.  
Hillsdale, Michigan 49242

On occasion the BPU has received utility payments late even though the Customer believes they have mailed them on time. To avoid possible delays by the postal service, we suggest payments be mailed 3 to 5 days in advance of the due date. Payments are only considered received once they have arrived directly at the BPU Office, and will be keyed the same day as received. Bills paid at “outside sites” are not considered paid until they are received at the BPU Office, and as such, can be subject to late charges and non-payment disconnection as provided herein. Payments made at “outside sites” are generally picked up and keyed the following business day.

### Pay by Phone

Alternatively, utility bills are payable through the BPU's phone payment service, *Point&Pay*, directly reachable at (844) 462-1011. MasterCard, Visa, Discover, and American Express cards are all accepted modes of payment. *Point&Pay* may also be reached by calling the BPU directly at (517) 437-3387 and following the automated voice prompt for redirection. These services are available to customers 24 hours a day for a 3% service fee.

### Online Payment

Payments can also be made via the City of Hillsdale website. Bills may be paid by credit card, debit card, or electronic check 24 hours a day with a 3% service fee. The link to pay a utility bill online can be found below:

[https://bsaonline.com/OnlinePayment/OnlinePaymentSearch/?PaymentApplicationType=10&uid=177&site\\_transition=true](https://bsaonline.com/OnlinePayment/OnlinePaymentSearch/?PaymentApplicationType=10&uid=177&site_transition=true)

*For all methods of payment:* The Customer has the duty to notify the BPU if a bill is not received. Any customer whose account for utility service is in arrears shall pay the billed amount plus any late charges assessed. Payments are applied first to the current bill and then applied progressively to those in arrears.

### Returned Checks

A check returned by the BPU will not be deposited a second time for clearing. A charge shall be assessed in accordance with that set forth in Appendix II, "Schedule A – Fees and Charges." The BPU will require the Customer to pay by cash, certified check, or money order.

### Responsibility

The Customer is responsible for notifying the BPU as to when utility service is to be taken out of their name. Each customer shall pay for utility services furnished to their premises until notice has been given to the BPU to discontinue service and for a reasonable time thereafter to enable the BPU to read the meters at their premises. When service is discontinued at any customer's premises, a final bill for service will be rendered and shall be payable by the date indicated on the bill. The BPU reserves the right to transfer any amounts outstanding on any closed accounts to any active accounts of a customer.

### Final Bill Collection

If a bill for utility services remains unpaid after thirty days, the BPU shall have the right to proceed with the collection of any unpaid bill through the courts, a collection agency, or by a lien filed with the City Assessor's Office.

### Collection by Lien

The City of Hillsdale shall have a lien upon all real property located within the city limits of Hillsdale as security for the collection of utility rates and charges supplied by the Hillsdale Board of Public Utilities, which lien shall become effective immediately upon the supplying of such utility service and shall thereafter be enforced in the manner provided by law. Any unpaid utility bill that is at least six months delinquent on April 1<sup>st</sup> of each year must be submitted to the City Assessor as a lien against that property.

Real Estate Agents are encouraged to contact the BPU to inquire about potential liens before closing on a property. All such calls are noted in our files.

### Payment Arrangements

Satisfactory payment arrangements, at a minimum, shall be the monthly current bill plus 1/6<sup>th</sup> of the past due.

### Landlord Tenant Agreement

This agreement is available to landlords in the BPU Office and in Appendix III of this document. Said agreement allows the landlord to choose if service is transferred to their name when a tenant moves out or if it is left off. A properly executed agreement will also protect the property from potential liens from unpaid tenant bills. The BPU retains the right to ask for a deposit from these tenants.

## Section 8

### **SERVICE TERMINATION PROVISIONS**

#### Termination Procedures Related to Moving

If the Utility Customer plans to move, the Customer has the responsibility of notifying the BPU Office at least 2 working days prior to the moving date to arrange for the BPU to discontinue service and for a reasonable time thereafter to enable the BPU to read the utility meters at the Customer's premise.

The Customer is responsible for the billings for utility service until the BPU is able to disconnect service and read the utility meters. When service is disconnected at a customer's premise for the purpose of moving, the Customer is still responsible for paying the bill by the due date.

#### Termination for Nonpayment

The following procedures and conditions shall be followed when payment has not been received within the allotted time. Except in an emergency, or as a protection of life or property, the BPU will not terminate utility service for nonpayment of charges on Saturday, Sunday, a BPU holiday or the day before a BPU holiday.

- **Final Notice** When a payment is not received by the stated due date on the bill, or within the two-day grace period, a final notice shall be mailed to the Customer and a late charge of 2% assessed against the account. This will indicate a "Pay By" date for payment to be received, or for satisfactory payment arrangements to be made, in order to avoid possible disconnection. (Senior Citizens will not be assessed a late charge; however, they will receive the letter.)
- **Disconnection** Approximately 12 calendar days after the final notice, if payment is not received, a door hanger will be delivered to the service address which will give an additional 2 calendar days to make payment. A trip charge will be assessed for delivering the door hanger in accordance with "Schedule A – Fees and Charges." If payment is not received, the service will be disconnected. A trip charge for disconnection will be assessed in accordance with Appendix II, "Schedule A – Fees and Charges." If disconnection occurs, payment must be made before reconnection is granted. A reconnection fee will be assessed in accordance with Appendix II, "Schedule A – Fees and Charges."

## Termination for Other Reasons

**Without Notice** The BPU reserves the right to terminate utility service to any customer, without notice, for any of the following reasons:

- Fraudulent representation as to the class of utility service.
- Where the Customer's equipment, wiring, or appliances, or the BPU's equipment or lines are creating or contributing to a serious and/or hazardous condition.
- Tampering with meters or other utility equipment belonging to the BPU.
- Repairs or emergency maintenance of BPU facilities.
- When necessary to protect the BPU from theft, fraud, or abuse.
- An unauthorized utility connection.
- The use of equipment that adversely affects the BPU's services to its other customers.
- Upon obvious vacating of the premises by a customer who is delinquent, thereby terminating the Customer's relationship with the BPU.
- Unavoidable shortages or interruptions of the BPU's sources of service.
- Fraud or material misrepresentation of identity for the purpose of obtaining utility service.
- Payment arrangements that have not been kept by the Customer.

**With Notice** The BPU may terminate service to any customer after one attempt to make personal contact or otherwise give notice by a representative of the BPU for any of the following reasons:

- The Customer's failure to update their temporary electric service to a permanent status or to otherwise fail to make appropriate arrangements to do so with the BPU.
- The Customer's failure to provide free access to its meters and service facilities to inspect, read, test, repair, remove, or replace the same. Locks, dogs, bushes, trees shall not impede such access, rubbish, or in any other manner.

## Life Support

When a customer has life support equipment on BPU service, the BPU must receive a doctor's letter substantiating the need. The BPU will maintain a list of those residences with life support and supply such list to appropriate personnel for the purpose of contacting customers when there is an unforeseen or scheduled power outage. It also enables the BPU to determine where the high priority areas are on the system in an emergency. While placement on this list does help prioritize outage situations, the Customer should have alternate plans for continued support if the outage is extended.

Customers with life support equipment on their service shall not be granted any preferential treatment when it comes to disconnecting for nonpayment. All customers will receive the written notifications as indicated above before disconnection.

Assistance

There are various agencies that may be able to provide assistance to customers in payment of their delinquent utility bills. That list includes, but may not be limited to:

Family Independence Agency	439-2200
Community Action Agency	437-3346
Salvation Army	437-4240
Michigan 211	Dial “211”



## Section 9

### **RESTORATION OF SERVICE PROVISIONS**

When service to a customer's premises has been terminated, the BPU will reconnect the service as soon as practical after receiving full payment

- All past due amounts.
- Trip charges as assessed in accordance with Appendix II, "Schedule A – Fees and Charges."
- Reconnection charges as assessed in accordance with Appendix II, "Schedule A – Fees and Charges."
- Any required deposits as set forth herein.

Payments for restoration of service must be made at the BPU Office at 45 Monroe Street, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Time and material charges will be applied when reconnecting service that has been disconnected from the tap pole.

## **Section 10**

### **MULTIPLE DWELLINGS**

When an electric or water meter serves more than one dwelling, the account shall remain in the landlord's name. Tenants will not be allowed to put the service in their name.

## **Section 11**

### **AFTER HOUR CHARGES**

Any reconnect for nonpayment performed after normal working hours is subject to the fee as stated in Appendix II, “Schedule A – Fees and Charges.”

If a customer places a call in the after hour emergency mailbox for power problems, water leaks, sewer back-ups, etc. and the BPU responds and it is determined that the cause of the problem is on the Customer’s side, then the Customer will be billed for after-hour services as stated in Appendix II, “Schedule A – Fees and Charges.”