

## UTILITY-RELATED PROGRAMS AND PROTECTIONS FOR SENIOR CITIZENS

spotlight

Are you age 65 or older? If so, inform your utility company. There are programs to protect and assist you if you are having difficulty paying your gas, electric or telephone bills.

### Winter Protections from Shutoff

The MPSC and state law requires all regulated gas and electric companies and electric cooperatives to provide shutoff protection for seniors during the *heating season (November 1 - March 31)*.

If you were shut off before November 1st, MPSC rules or state law require the company to restore your service during the heating season without you paying the past due amount, a deposit, reconnect fee, or other charges. There are no requirements for specific payment amounts during that time. However, when the heating season is over you will be placed on a payment plan and must begin to pay any amounts owed.

Consumers Energy (Consumers) and DTE Energy (DTE) have shutoff protection programs that help customers, including seniors, manage energy payments with extended time to pay and senior discount rates or credits.

Shutoffs outside of the heating season, for seniors or other customers, can occur only between 8 AM and 4 PM. Prior to a shutoff, you will get a 10-day disconnect notice and the company will make at least two attempts to contact you by telephone before service is shut off.

### Third Party Notification

You can designate someone else, such as a family member or friend, to receive bills, shutoff notices or other mailings from the company on your behalf. This allows them to help you keep track of your utility bills.

### Medical Emergencies

An energy bill that is subject to shut off due to non-payment may be postponed up to 21 days because of a medical emergency. Additional extensions may also be available. Provide your gas or electric company with a written statement from a doctor or public health official indicating that your condition will be made worse if utility service is shut off. A postponement for a medical emergency cannot exceed 63 days for the same individual or more than 126 days per household.

### Budget Billing Plan

Take the seasonal ups and downs out of your energy bills and pay the same amount each month.

### Partial Payment Option

As low-income customers of DTE or Consumers, if you are unable to pay the full amount of a bill, and receive a shutoff notice, you may make partial payments. There's also the option to designate either gas or electric service for termination. Contact your company for details.

### **State Emergency Relief (SER)**

Contact the Department of Human Services (DHS), if you are low-income and receive a shutoff notice, to get help paying your utility bills. Help is also available for fuel oil, wood, or propane. You do not have to be a client of DHS to apply for help in this year-round program.

### **Weatherization**

Low-income households may receive free energy conservation materials such as caulking, weather-stripping, insulation, and other services. This will help reduce energy use and lower utility bills.

### **Home Heating Credit (HHC)**

You may apply for the 2011 HHC until September 30, 2012. You must meet the income guidelines but you do not have to file an income tax return. Forms are available wherever other tax forms are provided or from the Michigan Department of Treasury.

### **Earned Income Tax Credit (EIC)**

If you are low-income and still working you may file a tax return for this federal income tax credit. You may be able to reduce the amount of taxes owed, as well as receive a credit.

### **State Earned Income Tax Credit (SEIC)**

When you file taxes for the 2011 tax year you may claim, if eligible, a Michigan Earned Income Tax Credit. This is equal to a percentage of the federal earned income tax credit.

### **Elder Law of Michigan**

Older adults and people with disabilities may receive help paying utilities, along with other basic needs such as food, medicine, housing, healthcare and taxes. Contact them online or over the phone at: [elderlawofmi.org/benefits](http://elderlawofmi.org/benefits) or 800-347-5297.

### **Office of Services to the Aging (OSA)**

OSA supports programs and services for adults age 60 and over. It also administers federal and state funds and manages grants for aging services. Help line: 888-929-9444

### **LifeLine Telephone Service**

If you are low-income and currently have telephone service you may be eligible for a discount on basic local service. Qualifying seniors may get a minimum discount of \$9.25 per month.

### **Michigan Veteran's Trust Fund**

Eligible wartime veterans and their families can apply for temporary assistance for emergencies or hardships including energy assistance. Contact them online or by phone using: [michigan.gov/dmva](http://michigan.gov/dmva) or 517-373-3130

### **Who Do You Call For Help?**

United Way 2-1-1 free and confidential phone service is available 24 hours a day and will provide information and referrals for agencies in your community that can assist you with your utility, food, housing, employment, childcare, transportation, health and senior services and more.

The MPSC staff can assist if you are having difficulty resolving issues with your utility company. Call toll free, 800-292-9555, write to:

Michigan Public Service Commission

P.O. Box 30221

Lansing, Michigan 48909

or email at:

[michigan.gov/mpsc](http://michigan.gov/mpsc)