

WAC 480-90-178 Billing requirements and payment date. (1) Customer bills must:

(a) Be issued at intervals not to exceed two one-month billing cycles, unless the utility can show good cause for delaying the issuance of the bill. The utility must be able to show good cause if requested by the commission;

(b) Show the total amount due and payable;

(c) Show the date the bill becomes delinquent if not paid;

(d) Show the utility's business address, business hours, and toll-free telephone number and emergency telephone number by which a customer may contact the utility;

(e) Show the current and previous meter readings, the current read date, and the total amount of therms used;

(f) Show the amount of therms used for each billing rate, the applicable billing rates per therm, the basic charge or minimum bill;

(g) Show the amount of any municipal tax surcharges or their respective percentage rates;

(h) Clearly identify when a bill has been prorated. A prorated bill must be issued when service is provided for a fraction of the billing period. Unless otherwise specified in the utility's tariff, the charge must be prorated in the following manner:

(i) Flat-rate service must be prorated on the basis of the proportionate part of the period that service was rendered;

(ii) Metered service must be billed for the amount metered. The basic or minimum charge must be billed in full;

(i) Clearly identify when a bill is based on an estimation.

(i) A utility must detail its method(s) for estimating customer bills in its tariff;

(ii) The utility may not estimate for more than four consecutive months unless the cause of the estimation is inclement weather, terrain, or a previous arrangement with the customer; and

(j) Clearly identify determination of maximum demand. A utility providing service to any customer on a demand basis must detail in its filed tariff the method of applying charges and of ascertaining the demand.

(2) The minimum time allowed for payment after the bill's mailing date must be fifteen days, if mailed from within the states of Washington, Oregon, or Idaho, or eighteen days if mailed from outside the states of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho.

(3) The utility must allow a customer to change a designated payment-due date when the customer has a satisfactory reason for the change. A satisfactory reason may include, but is not limited to, adjustment of a designated payment-due date to parallel receipt of income. The preferred payment date must be prior to the next billing date.

(4) With the consent of the customer, a utility may provide billings in electronic form if the bill meets all the requirements for the use of electronic information in this chapter. The utility must maintain a record of the consent as a part of the customer's account record, and the customer may change from electronic to printed billing upon request, as provided in this chapter. The utility must complete the change within two billing cycles of the request.

(5) Corrected bills:

(a) Upon discovery of an underbilling or overbilling resulting from a meter failure, meter malfunction, meter with unassigned energy usage, or any other billing error, a utility must issue the customer a corrected bill to recover or refund billed amounts. The utility must use the rate schedule in effect at the time of each affected billing period covered by the corrected bill. The utility must issue the corrected bill within sixty days from the date the utility discovered the underbilling or overbilling. However, except as provided for in subsection (7) of this section, when a utility discovers that it has underbilled a customer, it may not seek to collect for any period greater than six months from the date the error occurred.

(b) For the purposes of this subsection:

(i) A meter failure or malfunction is defined as: A mechanical malfunction or failure that prevents the meter or any ancillary data collection or transmission device from registering or transmitting the actual amount of energy used. A meter failure or malfunction includes, but is not limited to, a stopped meter, a meter that is faster or slower than the metering tolerance specified in WAC 480-90-338, or an erratic meter.

(ii) For the purpose of this rule, unassigned energy usage meter is defined as a meter that is installed at a valid service address and accurately records energy usage during a period of time where there was no active gas service account at that premises.

(iii) For the purpose of this rule, a billing error is defined as any error which results in incorrect charges.

(c) A utility must develop and maintain procedures to identify and repair or replace meters not functioning correctly and identify meter usage from unassigned usage meters. These procedures shall address steps taken to prevent corrected bills for underbilling errors that exceed six months in duration. The initial plan delineating the procedures must be filed with the commission by May 1, 2016. If the utility makes subsequent changes to the plan, the modified plan must be filed with the commission within thirty days of any changes. The plan must include, at a minimum:

(i) Procedures to prevent billing errors resulting from, but not limited to, billing errors due to incorrect prorated bills, mislabeled meter bases, incorrectly installed meters, incorrect billing rate schedules, or incorrect billing multipliers.

(ii) Procedures for investigating meter errors including, but not limited to, those created by stopped, slowed, and erratic usage meters.

(iii) Procedures for investigating meter usage from unidentified usage meters.

(6) For the purpose of this rule, a corrected bill may take the form of a newly issued bill or may be reflected as a line item adjustment on a subsequent monthly bill. When a corrected bill is issued, the utility must provide the following information on the corrected bill, in a bill insert, letter, or any combination of methods that clearly explains all the information required to be sent to the customer:

(a) The reason for the bill correction;

(b) A breakdown of the bill correction for each month included in the corrected bill;

(c) The total amount of the bill correction that is due and payable;

(d) The time period covered by the bill correction;

(e) The actions taken to resolve the cause of the bill correction; and

(f) When issuing a corrected bill for underbilling, an explanation of the availability of payment arrangements in accordance with WAC 480-90-138(1) Payment arrangements.

(7) Corrected bills issued for the following purposes are exempt from the provisions of subsection (5)(a) of this section:

(a) Meter failure or malfunction or billing error related to customer tampering with the utility's property, use of the utility's service through an illegal connection, or the customer fraudulently obtaining service.

(b) An estimated meter read made in accordance with subsection (1)(i) of this section is not considered a meter failure or malfunction or a billing error. A bill true-up based on an actual meter reading after one or more estimated bills is not considered a corrected bill for purposes of subsection (5)(a) of this section.

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(d) Show the utility's business address, business hours, and a toll-free telephone number and an emergency telephone number by which a customer may contact the utility;

(e) Show the current and previous meter readings, the current read date, and the total amount of kilowatt hours used;

(f) Show the amount of kilowatt hours used for each billing rate, the applicable billing rates per kilowatt hour, the basic charge or minimum bill;

(g) Show the amount of any municipal tax surcharges or their respective percentage rates;

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