

The PUC's Response to February 2021 Winter Weather Event

Water and Sewer Utilities FAQ

What is the PUC doing to help Texans experiencing economic hardship due to the February 2021 Winter Weather Event?

On February 21, 2021 the Public Utility Commission of Texas responded to the governor's disaster declaration due to the extreme weather event with a plan to grant exceptions to certain rules that affect investor-owned utilities and their customers in Texas.

Who are these actions intended to help?

These efforts are intended to help those Texans in genuine distress because of the extreme weather event and are experiencing unusually high bills or usage during the month of February. In some instances, your water or sewer utility may have also been unable to read your meter due to the storm.

How are water and sewer utility customers affected?

The Commission has ordered PUC-regulated water and sewer utilities across the state to immediately suspend disconnections for non-payment. These utilities are also not authorized to charge late fees or interest on a deferred payment plan during this time frame. This order can be found at:

[51812RuleExceptions.pdf \(texas.gov\)](#)

What is the difference between a "retail public utility" and a "water and sewer utility," "utility," or "public utility"?

The term "retail public utility" refers to all types of water and sewer providers, including a county, municipality, district or non-profit water supply and sewer service corporation (WSC). The terms "water and sewer utility," "utility," or "public utility" refer only to investor-owned utilities (IOUs).

Does the disconnection for non-payment directive apply to communities, municipalities, districts, and non-profit WSCs that provide retail water & sewer utility service?

The Commission's order only applies to IOUs operating outside the corporate limits of a municipality. The governing body or elected board of a county, municipality, district or non-profit WSC is responsible for making the business decisions regarding the disconnection of service for nonpayment because of the winter weather event.

There are two exceptions One of the rules that was suspended applies in situations where: (1) a customer receives water service from one retail public utility and sewer service from a different retail public utility; (2) the customer has unpaid charges for sewer service; and (3) the sewer provider has requested that the water provider discontinue water service, and the water and sewer provider have entered into an agreement allowing for disconnection of water service for unpaid sewer charges. The suspension of this rule applies to a county, municipality, district, or non-profit WSC.

A second rule that was suspended applies in situations where: (1) a customer receives water service from an IOU and sewer service from a different retail public utility; and (2) the water and sewer providers have an agreement that allows the water IOU to provide billing services for the sewer provider. The rule states that a customer who is charged a reconnect fee for nonpayment must pay the reconnect fee on the water provider's tariff. The suspension of this rule applies to a county, municipality, district, or non-profit WSC.

What should counties, municipalities, districts, and non-profit WSCs do to respond to customers regarding water and sewer utility service in response to the February 2021 Winter Weather Event?

We encourage these entities to review the Commission's order and the direction given to IOUs when making their own decision regarding disconnections for nonpayment during the February 2021 Winter Weather Event. Many of these entities have decided not to disconnect customers for non-payment during this time; however, we have not heard from all of them. We also encourage these entities to review the order as it relates to late fees on delinquent bills and interest on deferred payment plans

If you are a customer of a county, municipality, district, or non-profit WSC, you are encouraged to contact your retail public utility directly regarding your questions and concerns.

What do I need to do if I am a customer and cannot pay my water bill for February 2021?

You will continue to receive monthly bills for water and sewer service and accrue a balance from your retail public water and sewer utility during this time frame. If you are unable to pay your bill in full, immediately contact your water and sewer utility provider and ask for a deferred payment plan for your entire bill or the portion of the bill you are not able to pay. If you feel your February usage is not accurate, you should dispute the bill with your retail public water or sewer utility and pay the portion of your bill you are able to pay.

Can I be charged a late fee for not being able to pay all or a portion of my bill during this crisis?

Customers that receive retail water or sewer service from an IOU cannot be charged a late fee for inability to pay all or a portion of their bill during this crisis.

What if I own or represent an Investor Owned Utility (IOU) that is having a difficult time paying electric bills during the February 2021 Winter Weather Event?

If you represent an IOU having a difficult time paying your own electric bill, first contact your electric provider to request a payment plan. Then contact the PUC's Department of Utility Outreach (DUO) at DUO@puc.texas.gov. You may need to apply for a rate increase with the Commission. (Requirements for requesting a rate and tariff change differ according to the size of your utility.)