

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

505 VAN NESS AVENUE
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94102-3298



March 26, 2020

SUBJECT: Emergency Customer Protections to Support Customers Affected by the COVID-19 State of Emergency

Dear Class C, D Water and Sewer Utilities:

The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) requests information on the customer protection measures taken by Class C and Class D Water and Sewer Utilities to protect customers by continuing water and services to residential customers who are unable to pay their bills because of the coronavirus health crisis. For reference, we are providing you the measures taken by Class A and Class B Water Utilities.

On March 17, 2020, we sent a letter to Class A and Class B water utilities regarding consumer protections. Please see excerpt below:

“We write to you in response to Governor Gavin Newsom’s proclamation of a state of emergency in California due to the spread of COVID-19. This letter serves as notification that the CPUC plans to take action to provide emergency customer protection measures for customers in California to prevent disconnections for unpaid bills during the pendency of the emergency. You should act on the customer protections measures described in this letter immediately; the CPUC will vote to ratify these measures in the near future.

On March 4, 2020, Governor Newsom declared a State of Emergency in California related to COVID-19. On March 12, 2020, Governor Newsom issued a new Executive Order recognizing that individuals exposed to COVID-19 may be unable to report to work due to illness or quarantines, and ordering numerous measures including social distancing. On March 16, 2020, Governor Newsom issued an Executive Order requesting that the CPUC monitor the measures undertaken by public and private utility providers to implement customer service protections in response to COVID-19.

It is clear that the response to COVID-19 will be extremely disruptive to all Californians and will impact many Californians’ ability to work. We have dealt with highly disruptive events in the recent past with the devastating wildfires in Northern and Southern California. In response, the CPUC adopted a series of requirements for utility companies (electric, gas, water, sewer) and communications providers, culminating in customer protections measures adopted in two decisions D.19-07-015 and D.19-08-025. These customer protection measures apply in cases where the declared emergency relates to the disruption of service or to the degradation of service.

COVID-19 has not resulted in the same disruptions or degradations to utility service in California as the recent wildfires. We expect that utility services will remain reliable and assist in California’s COVID-19 response by allowing more people to safely self-quarantine or telework. Despite the differences in the cause of the emergencies, the customer protections adopted in D.19-07-015 and D.19-08-025, which include moratoriums on disconnections, can mitigate some of the disruptions to Californians’ daily lives related to the COVID-19 response – especially those Californians who are economically vulnerable.

In response to COVID-19, some utilities and service providers have already announced voluntary moratoriums on service disconnections for non-payment.

Because of the seriousness of the situation, we expect the utilities and service providers subject to D.19-07-015 and D.19-08-025 to extend the same applicable customer protections directed in D.19-07-015 and D.19-08-025 to customers in response to the declared state of emergency due to the spread of COVID-19. We also expect the utilities and service providers to report to the CPUC on all customer protection measures they implement in response to COVID-19 as soon as they are implemented, so that the CPUC may publicly report on these measures. These customer protections should be retroactively applied to March 4, 2020.”

Subject to CPUC action to ratify this direction, the utilities and service providers will be expected to file an Advice Letter (Tier 1) reporting compliance with implementing the mandated customer protections.

Action Item: Please inform the CPUC Water Division as soon as possible, but no later than Wednesday April 1st, 2020 of the actions you have taken to respond to the coronavirus health crisis.
Please let us know:

- 1) The utility website address if used and a description of the COVID-19 information included on the website, particularly as it relates to continuity of service.
- 2) If a utility does not have a website, please inform the CPUC of any mailer, flyer, or bulletin being made available to your customers.

Please send responses to water.division@cpuc.ca.gov or Water Division, 505 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94102-3298.

Sincerely,



Alice Stebbins
Executive Director