



## **BILL OF RIGHTS For Residential Customers of Water Utilities**

The South Carolina Office of Regulatory Staff wants water utility customers to know their rights and responsibilities and whom to contact for assistance when they have questions or problems regarding regulated water service.

### **BE AN INFORMED CUSTOMER. KNOW YOUR RIGHTS.**

- 1.** As a general rule, ***you have the right*** to establish water service if you satisfactorily establish your credit and neither you nor any member of your household is indebted to the water utility for previously furnished water service, if you provide the water utility with necessary and reasonable access to the premises to be served, if your utilization of the water does not pose a hazardous or dangerous condition, and there is already water service in your area. If there are no water lines near your home, you may or may not have the right to have the lines extended to serve you. If the lines are extended to serve you, you may be required to pay part of the cost of the extension. If you have any questions concerning your right to the service, you should contact the water utility serving your subdivision.
- 2.** ***You have the right*** to establish your credit in any one of the following ways and to have the utility's personnel explain all these methods to you. If you can show that you have been a customer of the same water utility and have not had two consecutive 30-day arrears or more than two non-consecutive 30-day arrears in the past 24 months, or provide a satisfactory guarantor or co-signer, who is a customer of the same water utility with good credit, to guarantee payment of your bills if you do not pay them, or provide a letter of good credit from a reliable source, or make a cash deposit with the water utility.
- 3.** If you are required to make a cash deposit, the maximum amount cannot exceed an amount equal to an estimated two (2) months (60 days) billing for a new customer, or an amount equal to the total actual bills of the 2 highest consecutive months based on your billing history of the preceding 12 months, or portion of the year if the service is on a seasonal basis. If you make a cash deposit with the utility, ***you have the right*** to have your deposit refunded any time you discontinue service, less any unpaid balance. ***You have the right*** to a refund of your deposit plus interest (which begins to accrue, at a rate prescribed by the Public Service Commission, after your deposit has been held by the utility for six (6) months) after two years unless you have had two consecutive 30-day arrears or more than two non-consecutive 30-day arrears, or your service has been terminated for nonpayment, or you discontinued service with the utility and left an unpaid balance.
- 4.** ***You have the right*** to pay your bill without incurring late-payment charges so long as you pay it within 25 days of the billing date shown on your water bill for current monthly charges.
- 5.** ***You have the right*** to be given written notice from the utility at least 10 days before your water service can be disconnected for non-payment of your water bill.
- 6.** ***You have the right***, prior to a scheduled disconnection of your service, to arrange with the water utility for a Deferred Payment Plan (DPP) to make payment by installments if you can show that you are unable to pay the amount due. In this DPP arrangement, you must make installment payments of not less than 1/6 of the outstanding balance for a period not to exceed 6 months, and you must pay in full your current monthly charges. You are not eligible if you currently are under a DPP and have failed to conform to the terms and conditions.
- 7.** ***You have the right*** to a credit or refund of the excess amount paid, not to exceed the applicable Statute of Limitations, if the water utility has overcharged you as a result of a misapplied schedule, an error in reading the meter, a skipped meter reading, or any other human or machine error.

8. **You have the right** to pay in equal installments a deficient amount resulting from the water utility undercharging you for any one of the reasons stated in # 7 above. The equal installment amount shall be added to the bill over the same number of billing periods during which you were undercharged.
9. **You have the right** to have the water utility test your meter for accuracy if you suspect a malfunction. This inspection must be without charge after 12 months from the date of the meter installation or from the last date the meter was tested for accuracy. **You have the right** to be present or to appoint a representative to be present when the water utility tests the meter. **You have the right** to be furnished with the results of the meter test. If an overcharge or undercharge occurred as a result of a fast or slow meter with an error in registration of more than 3 percent, the bills will be increased or decreased accordingly, if the time at which the error first developed or occurred can be definitely determined. If the time cannot be determined, then adjustments to the bill can be made for no more than 60 days.
10. **You have the right** to have the water utility assist you in selecting the most economical rate schedule, inform you of the method of reading your meter, provide you with a statement of your consumption for the past 12 months, and provide you with an explanation of the utility's billing procedures.
11. **You have the right** to contact the water utility or its authorized representatives at all hours in case of emergency or unscheduled interruptions in your water service.
12. **You have the right** to request information and assistance from the utility in order to secure safe and efficient service.
13. **You have the right** to have a complaint investigated by the utility promptly and thoroughly.
14. If you need assistance with a complaint against your water utility that you cannot resolve by dealing with the water utility on your own, **you have the right** to contact the Office of Regulatory Staff's Consumer Services Department. Consumer Services will work with you and the water utility in an effort to resolve your complaint. The Office of Regulatory Staff is located in Columbia and can be reached by calling its toll free telephone number, 1-800-922-1531 or, if from the Columbia area, (803) 737-5252 or at [www.regulatorystaff.sc.gov](http://www.regulatorystaff.sc.gov).
15. If, after working with the water utility and the Office of Regulatory Staff's Consumer Services Department, you are not satisfied with the outcome of this process, **you have the right** to file a petition against the water utility and request a hearing before the Public Service Commission. To file a petition, you must prepare a written statement with the following information: your name and address, the name of your water utility, a clear and brief statement of the facts surrounding the complaint, and a description of the relief you hope to obtain from the commission. Mail the petition to the Public Service Commission, Chief Clerk/Administrator, P.O. Drawer 11649, Columbia, South Carolina 29211. The Public Service Commission may schedule a public hearing. At the hearing, both you and your water utility may present testimony and evidence before the commission. After hearing the testimony, the Public Service Commission will make a decision and issue an order ruling on your petition.

*The South Carolina Office of Regulatory Staff wants to inform you of your rights and responsibilities as a consumer, wants you to understand the responsibilities of your water utility, and wants you to call upon its Consumer Services Department if you need assistance. This statement gives you a summary of your rights as a customer of a water utility. More detailed provisions are set out in law, commission rules and regulations, and the tariffs of the water utility.*