

Sept. 7, 2017

Get the Facts: Public asked for input on customer service rules for Ontario energy utilities

The Ontario Energy Board (OEB) has launched an online survey at www.oeb.ca/customerservicesurvey to gather input from residential and small business consumers on customer service rules for Ontario's electricity and natural gas utilities and unit sub-meter providers. The objective of the OEB's comprehensive review is to ensure that the rules continue to serve the needs of customers, and that they maintain an appropriate balance between consumer protection and the ongoing operational needs of energy utilities. The OEB committed to review and evaluate the customer service rules once there was sufficient experience with them.

The OEB is asking for feedback on six categories of customer service rules that it has identified as priority areas:

Disconnections

Energy utilities are allowed to disconnect customers who don't pay overdue amounts. How much advance notice should customers be given before they have their power disconnected? Is there any time when customers shouldn't be disconnected?

Bill Due Dates and Late Payment Charges

Customers who don't pay their energy bills when they're due may be charged a late payment penalty. What would be a reasonable amount of time for customers to pay their bills before late payment charges start to apply?

Security Deposits

Customers with no payment history or a poor payment history may be asked to pay a security deposit. Should energy utilities be allowed to ask for security deposits? When should security deposits be returned?

Equal Monthly Payments/Billing Plans

Energy bills can vary from month to month. But some residential customers prefer to spread out their bills evenly, where any difference is reconciled once a year. One option is the equal payment plan, where equalized payments are automatically withdrawn monthly. Another option is the equal billing plan, where the amount due is equalized over the billing periods in a year. How important is it to have these options?

Arrears Payments Agreements

If a residential customer hasn't paid their energy bills and has outstanding amounts owing, they can go on a payment plan called an arrears payment agreement, which spreads out the amount owing over a longer period of time instead of having it due all at once. How much time should be given to customers to repay amounts that are owing? Should energy utilities be allowed to ask for a down payment as a condition of going on an arrears payment plan?

Allocation of Payments

Some energy utilities collect payments for other services like water and sewage. If those utilities apply payments to energy charges first, they won't charge late payment penalties or disconnect customers who paid enough to cover the energy charges but not the full bill. But customers may still face late payment charges from third parties for the non-energy services that are billed but not paid in full. Should energy utilities be required to apply payments to cover a residential customer's energy charges first in all cases?

The survey, together with the OEB's engagement with energy utilities and other stakeholders, will inform the OEB about how the customer service rules for residential and small business customers should evolve in the public interest. The second phase of the review, which will proceed later, will examine customer service rules on management of customer accounts and correction of billing errors. A report outlining the findings from the OEB's engagement activities will be posted to the OEB's website once it's complete.

Most of the OEB's customer service rules for electricity utilities also apply to unit sub-meter providers. Unit sub-meter providers are companies that provide metering and billing services for some condos or apartments that have their own individual meters.

Natural gas utilities in Ontario are required to have customer service standards and practices in dealing with residential customers. Their policies cover the major areas addressed by the OEB's electricity sector rules.

Find out more about customer service rules for electricity utilities and unit sub-meter providers at www.oeb.ca/consumer-protection/rules-electricity-utilities, and for natural gas utilities at www.oeb.ca/consumer-protection/service-policies-natural-gas-utilities.

If you have a complaint about the service you are receiving from your energy utility, the OEB wants to hear from you. You can submit your complaint online at www.oeb.ca/consumer-protection/make-complaint or phone the OEB at 1-877-632-2727 (toll-free).

About the Ontario Energy Board

The OEB is the independent regulator of Ontario's electricity and natural gas sectors. It makes decisions that serve the public interest. Its goal is to promote a sustainable and efficient energy sector that provides consumers with reliable energy services at a reasonable cost.

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Contact Us

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