



CITY OF WASCO, CALIFORNIA POLICY ON DISCONTINUATION OF RESIDENTIAL WATER SERVICE

The City of Wasco recognizes that all of its' water customers have a right to safe, accessible and affordable drinking water and that the loss of water service causes tremendous hardship and undue stress, including health risks to vulnerable populations. The City has established this policy to minimize the number of customers who lose access to water service due to the inability to pay because water service discontinuations threaten human health and well-being and water service discontinuations have a disproportionate impact on certain segments of the population. These segments include infants, children, the elderly, low-income families, communities of color, people for whom English is a second language, physically disabled persons and persons with life-threatening medical conditions. This policy is adopted in accordance with the guidelines established by California Health and Safety Code Section 116900 et seq also known as the Water Shutoff Protection Act.

THE CITY'S BILLING PROCESS

The City bills its water customers, in arrears, on the first of each month for water use during the billing period which ended in the middle of the month preceding the billing date. The water bills are due on or about the tenth of the month and if not paid within 20 days (on or about the 20th of the month) become delinquent and subject to penalty. If the delinquent bill is still outstanding by a second delinquency date (on or about the 20th of the month following the billing), a delinquency notice will be mailed informing the customer of the impending shutoff of their water services unless they make payment or payment arrangements with the City prior to the twentieth of the second month following the billing. This arrangement ensures customers are not shutoff until their bill is delinquent for 60 days.

The following example is illustrative of the process only (The dates are examples and will be adjusted for days the City offices are not open)

Billing (service) Period	July 16 to August 15
Bill Mailed on	September 1
Payment Due by	September 20
Penalty applied	September 21
Second delinquency date	October 20
Delinquency bill mailed	November 1
Services Shut-off (discontinued)	November 20

DELINQUENCY NOTICES

The delinquency notice shall include:

- 1) The customer's name and address
- 2) The amount of delinquency
- 3) The date by which payment arrangements need to be made in order to avoid discontinuation of residential service
- 4) A description of the process or procedure to
 - a. apply for an extension of time to pay the delinquent charges
 - b. petition for bill review and appeal
 - c. request a deferred, reduced or alternative payment schedule

UNDELIVERABLE NOTICES

If the written notice is returned as undeliverable, the City will attempt to contact the customer or an adult occupying the residence by telephone. If the City makes contact by telephone, the representative will specifically do the following: (1) offer to provide a copy of this Policy; (2) offer options to avert the service discontinuation, including alternative payment schedules, deferred payments, minimum payments, procedures for requesting amortization of the unpaid balance; (3) and explain the process to request a review or appeal of the delinquent charges. If the City is unable to make contact by telephone, the City will visit the residence and post a conspicuous notice of imminent discontinuation of water service and a copy of this Policy.

NONRESIDENT OWNERS/NONOWNER RESIDENTS

If the customer to whom the bill is sent does not reside at the residence, then, at least ten days prior to the date of termination, the city shall also provide a written delinquency notice to the residence addressed to "Occupant" or otherwise make reasonable attempts to contact an adult person residing at the residence by telephone or personal contact or by posting a notice of termination in a conspicuous location at the residence and provide a copy of this policy to the residential occupant and inform them that they have a right to become customers, to whom the service will then be billed, without being required to pay any amount which may be due on the delinquent account.

PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS

A customer may enter into payment arrangements with the City if they have certain hardships or are otherwise unable to pay their water bill by its shutoff date. The City may be able to offer a plan for deferred or reduced payments or alternative payment arrangements. In order to avert the discontinuation of residential water services, customers should, at the earliest possible date, contact:

CITY OF WASCO FINANCE DEPARTMENT
764 E STREET, WASCO, CA 93280
(661) 758-7230

If the customer, for sixty (60) days or more, either (i) fails to comply with the agreed-upon plan or (ii) does not pay his or her current residential services charges while on the payment plan, then service may be discontinued no sooner than five (5) business days after the City posts a final notice of intent to discontinue service in a prominent and conspicuous location at the customer's property.

Water Department personnel will offer a copy of this policy to all delinquent customers who contact the city by telephone or in-person and offer to discuss payment arrangements.

DISCONTINUED SERVICES

If the City discontinues residential water services for nonpayment a copy of this policy will be provided to the customer.

RESTORING SERVICES

The City will promptly provide information regarding the procedures for restoring service to customers once their service is discontinued, including the payment of applicable reconnection service fees.

SPECIAL PROVISIONS

For residential customers (or tenant of customers) who demonstrate a household income below 200 percent of the federal poverty line, the City will:

- a) Set a reconnection fee of not more than the lesser of the cost of the reconnection, or \$50 during operating hours and \$150 during non-operating hours. These maximums are subject to increases based on changes in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) effective January 1, 2021.
- b) Waive interest charges on delinquent bills once every twelve months.

The City will not discontinue water service to a customer (or tenant of a customer) who:

- a) Submits the certification of a primary care provider that discontinuation of service will be life-threatening too, or pose a serious threat to the health and safety of, a resident of the premises where the service is provided, and
- b) Demonstrates that he or she is financially unable to pay for residential service within the normal billing cycle as provided for under the Water Shutoff Prevention Act as if any member of the customer's household is a current recipient of CalWORKs, CalFresh, general assistance, Medi-Cal, Supplemental Security Income/State Supplementary Payment Program, or California Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, or the customer declares that the household's annual income is less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level and,
- c) The customer is willing to enter into an amortization agreement, alternative payment schedule, or a plan for a deferred or reduced payment, consistent with the City's written policies with respect to all delinquent charges.

If these conditions are met the City will offer a plan for deferred or reduced payments or alternative payment arrangements or a combination of those arrangements. While under this arrangement, residential service may be discontinued no sooner than 5 business days after the City posts a final notice of intent to disconnect service in a prominent and conspicuous location at the property if the customer, for sixty (60) days or more, either (i) fails to comply with the agreed-upon plan or (ii) does not pay his or her current residential services charges while on the payment plan.

CONTESTING OR APPELLING A WATER BILL

If a customer believes his bill is incorrect or based on incorrect meter readings the customer may request a review of their bill or may file a water usage complaint. The City's water usage complaint procedures state that the Water Department will be sent to the address within two working days to check the meter read and the leak detector on the meter. Water services will not be shut off during the appeals process. There are further steps outlined in the water usage complaint procedures which are available at City Offices and on the City website (<http://www.ci.wasco.ca.us/>).

BILL REVIEW AND APPEAL

Any customer in receipt of a notice of impending service discontinuation may appeal the delinquent rate, charge, or fee giving rise to the discontinuation notice unless an appeal of the same rate, charge, or fee has previously been received and resolved. The customer shall file the appeal within five (5) business days of receiving the disputed bill, or by delivering a written notice of appeal on a form provided by the City that explains the basis for the appeal, including an explanation of any alleged errors in the City's billing practices. The appeal will be reviewed, heard, and resolved in accordance with the following procedure:

- a. The City Manager's Office ("CMO") shall review the appeal form and all materials submitted in support of the appeal and shall issue a tentative decision regarding the appeal within ten (10) business days from the date of receipt of the appeal.
- b. The CMO shall mail the tentative decision to the appellant.
- c. The customer has ten (10) business days from the date of the decision to accept the tentative decision or request a hearing with the CMO.
- d. If a hearing is requested, the CMO shall schedule and hold a hearing within thirty (30) calendar days.
- e. At least ten (10) business days prior to the hearing, written notice of the date and time of the hearing shall be mailed to the customer.
- f. At the conclusion of the hearing, the CMO shall have fifteen (15) business days to issue a final, written decision justifying his or her decision. The CMO may grant the appeal and adjust or rescind the delinquent rate, charge, or fee under the following circumstances:
 - i. The rate, charge, or fee was erroneously calculated and therefore imposed in error due to a meter defect, accounting mistake, or other reason;
 - ii. During the relevant billing period, there was a leak of water at the customer's residence which could not have been reasonably discovered by the customer and which was corrected immediately upon its discovery;
 - iii. In the interest of fairness or justice, extraordinary circumstances merit an adjustment or rescission of the rate, charge, or fee.
- g. Such a decision shall be mailed to the appellant.
- h. The customer may appeal an adverse determination by the CMO to the City Council.

AVAILABILITY OF THIS POLICY

This policy will be posted on the City's website (<http://www.ci.wasco.ca.us/>) and be provided to customers in writing upon request.