

My landlord shut off my utilities!

Should I read this?

Yes, you should read this resource if you rent the place where you live in Washington State. You should read this if your landlord shuts off your utilities to try to force you to move.

What will I learn by reading this?

- What to do if your landlord illegally shuts off your utilities.
- Where to get legal help.

There are new important utility protections for residents in Washington.

Starting July 23, 2023, residential electric or water services cannot be shut off for non-payment or overdue bills during National Weather Service heat related alert days for the area that you live in. You may also be able to have service turned back on for heat alert days if it was already disconnected for overdue bills.

These new protections will stop shut off at your residence **no matter which type of utility service provider you use** including:

- Utilities and Transportation Commission regulated privately owned utilities
- Power and light Cooperatives,
- Community water associations,
- Any private or community owned sewer and water districts or services,
- City or town owned utilities,
- Privately owned utility companies
- Any Public Utility District



These new protections will stop shut off at your residence for **all types of homes** including:

- Apartments on metered utilities
- Mobile homes and trailers in a mobile home park
- Rental houses and apartments
- Homes you own that you also live in

These new protections also stop your landlord from shutting off your electric or water for non-payment or overdue bills during National Weather Service heat related alert days for the area that you live in. You may also be able to have your landlord have the service turned back on for heat alert days if it was already disconnected for overdue bills.

This is how the new protections work. On any day that the National Weather Service:

- 1.** Issues (announces) or says it plans to issue a **heat related alert** such as:
 - An excessive heat warning
 - A heat advisory
 - An excessive heat watch
 - Or any similar alert
- 2.** For the area in which your residence is located
- 3.** **Then you can ask for your electric or water services to be kept on** even if you are overdue on bills or already have a shut off due to non-payment.

Your utility company or landlord must provide you with information about how to ask for your services to not be shut off or to be turned back on during heat alert days. Your bill, overdue notice or shut off notice should have this information on it somewhere.

If your services were already shut off for non-payment and you are going to ask for them to be turned on for heat alert days, **your landlord or utility provider might require that you start a payment plan to have the service turned back on.**

- The payments for the plan can't be more than 6% of your monthly income unless you want the payments to be higher

- Even if you choose higher payments, you can only go back into default on the payments if you fail to pay **only** the amount that is 6% of your monthly income. **Your landlord or utility company can't say you defaulted on the plan for failure to make payments for anything above 6% of your monthly income.**

What does the law say?

Under state law at [RCW 59.18.300](#), it is unlawful for a landlord to intentionally (on purpose) shut off utility service. This includes water, hot water, heat, electricity, or gas, except temporarily to make needed repairs.

In other words, it is illegal for a landlord to shut off your utilities just to try to make you leave.

You can sue the landlord (usually in Small Claims Court) for \$100 for each day that you did not have utilities. Read [What is Small Claims Court?](#) and [How do I Sue in Small Claims Court?](#)

Can a landlord ever legally shut off the utilities?

Maybe. If your lease says you were supposed to pay the utilities, but you did not, the utility company might shut off the utilities.

If you have “**abandoned**” the place—you moved out without telling the landlord and stopped paying rent—the landlord may shut off the utilities.

You should be protected from electric and water shut off for overdue bills or non-payment for days that have a heat alert. To learn more about the heat alert protections, read the section of this resource called “There are new important utility protections for residents in Washington”.

My landlord shut off my utilities. What can I do?

If you can safely turn the utilities back on, such as by flipping back a switch, you should. If only your landlord has access to the utilities, try to get legal help right away. See how to get legal help below.

While you are trying to get legal help, you should also write and give the landlord a letter about turning the utilities back on. You can use the form letter below. It might also help to contact your local government agency that is in charge of building codes.

Some code enforcement officials might turn the utilities back on for you.

If your landlord shut off the water or electric because you are overdue on your bill, **you can ask your landlord to turn the service back on for heat alert days.** Your landlord might be able to make you start a payment plan on the overdue amount in order to have the water or electric turned back on. To learn more about the heat alert protections, read the section of this resource called “There are new important utility protections for residents in Washington”.

If you need utility assistance, call 2-1-1 or visit their website at search.wa211.org.

Get Legal Help

- **Apply online:** nwjustice.org/apply-online
- **Facing Eviction?** Call 1-855-657-8387
- **Facing Foreclosure?** Call 1-800-606-4819
- **Facing a legal issue in King County** (other than Eviction or Foreclosure)? Call 211 (or toll-free 1-877-211-9274) weekdays 8:00 am to 6:00 pm. They will refer you to a legal aid provider.
- **Facing a legal issue outside of King County** (other than Eviction or Foreclosure)? Call the CLEAR Hotline at 1-888-201-1014 weekdays between 9:15 am and 12:15 pm or apply online at nwjustice.org/apply-online.
- **Seniors (age 60 and over)** with a legal issue outside of King County can also call CLEAR*Sr at 1-888-387-7111

Deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired callers can call any of these numbers using the relay service of your choice.

Interpreters provided.

This publication provides general information concerning your rights and responsibilities. It is not intended as a substitute for specific legal advice.

© 2023 Northwest Justice Project — 1-888-201-1014.

(Permission for copying and distribution granted the Alliance for Equal Justice and to individuals for non-commercial purposes only.)

Notice Requesting Restoration of Utilities

(Date)

(Landlord's Name)

(Landlord's Street address)

(City, state and zip)

To: _____,

This is to notify you that the rental at _____ which you manage and which I live in needs these utilities restored:

The Washington Residential Landlord Tenant Act requires you to begin to do this within 24 hours to repair the loss of hot or cold water, heat or electricity, or a condition imminently hazardous to life.

If the repairs are not completed within the applicable period of time, I intend to use the remedies provided in the Act.

If you have turned off these utilities purposely to force me to move, this is also unlawful under RCW 59.18.300 and I may sue for damages for each day that the utilities were off.

Sincerely,

(Signature)

(Print name)

(Phone number / email - optional)