

MANITOBA) Order No. 14/08
)
THE PUBLIC UTILITIES BOARD ACT) February 29, 2008

BEFORE: Graham F. J. Lane, CA, Chairman
Len Evans, LLD, Member
Monica Girouard, CGA, Member

CENTRA GAS MANITOBA INC. - AN ORDER
APPROVING GAS AND COMBINED GAS/ELECTRIC
SERVICES DISCONNECTION AND RECONNECTION
POLICY AND PROCEDURES

The Public Utilities Board (Board) in Order No. 13/04 dated February 13, 2004, approved the conditions precedent and procedures of Centra Gas Manitoba Inc. (Centra) known as Service Disconnection and Reconnection Policy and Procedures for the discontinuance of service as set out in Section 104.1(6) of *The Public Utilities Board Act*.

In Order No. 131/04 dated October 28, 2004, the Board allowed *inter alia* Manitoba Hydro to provide a single bill to customers reflecting the combined cost of receiving gas and electric services.

The current Service Disconnection and Reconnection Policy and Procedures as approved is designed to meet the conditions applicable to gas customers who receive their gas bills separate from their electric bills. The introduction of a single bill from Manitoba Hydro reflecting both gas and electricity charges prompted a review of these Procedures and Policies.

The Disconnection and Reconnection Policy and Procedures approved in this Order now includes all customers who have both gas and electric service and applies to arrears in both the gas and electric accounts as reflected in a single bill. This Order allows for the installation of an electrical load limiter at any time of the year where the customer's bill is in arrears. Centra is also required to reconnect the gas service by October 1 of each year thereby eliminating the potential risk of harm to a customer because of a lack of heat. Customers will have the

right to appeal to the Board the disconnection and reconnection of service including the installation of the load limiter.

Centra is obligated to conduct an assessment of a customer's ability to reset the electrical load limiter as well as other risks to the customer. A risk assessment is also required for all disconnected customers. In the circumstance where a customer poses a threat to the safety or well-being of Centra's employees or agents, Centra will need to take all the necessary precautions for the protection of its staff and agents when visiting the premises for the purpose of reconnection.

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED THAT:

1. The Service Disconnection and Reconnection Policy and Procedures attached as Appendix "A" and effective February 29, 2008 BE AND IS HEREBY APPROVED.

THE PUBLIC UTILITIES BOARD

"GRAHAM F. J. LANE, CA"
Chairman

"H. M. SINGH"
Acting Secretary

Certified a true copy of
Order No. 14/08 issued by The
Public Utilities Board

Acting Secretary

Manitoba Hydro/Centra Gas
Gas and Combined Gas/Electric Services Disconnection and Reconnection
Policy and Procedures

(This document replaces Board Order No. 13/04 pursuant to Sec. 104 of The Public Utilities Board Act.)

POLICY AND PROCEDURES

1.0 PURPOSE:

The purpose of this document is to outline and define the disconnection and reconnection policies and procedures for customers with gas or combined gas/electric services.

Disconnection, in accordance with the steps outlined in the following policy and procedures, will occur if a customer is in arrears and full payment or payment arrangements suitable to the Company have not been made.

Reconnection, in accordance with the following policy and procedures, will occur as soon as it is reasonably possible after the account returns to good standing.

2.0 Scope:

The policy and procedures apply to customers with gas or combined gas/electric services. Procedures are detailed to reflect the variety of situations that may occur for each of the following customer segments as a result of the introduction of the consolidated billing statement. The policy and procedures that follow do not apply to customers with electric only service.

Customer segments include:

2.1 Residential owners and tenants responsible for gas and combined gas/electric services

2.2 Residential landlords responsible for providing tenant gas and combined gas/electric services covered under *The Residential Tenancies Act* (C.C.S.M. c R119)

2.3 Mixed Use Residential/Non-residential

For purposes of this Policy and Procedures, "mixed use residential/non-residential premises" is defined as all premises in which there is a mix of residential and non-residential uses, where the person occupying the premises is billed for provision of the gas or combined gas/electric services.

2.4 Commercial Customers

Commercial customers will receive notice prior to disconnection and actual disconnections will occur throughout the year. In exceptional circumstances these procedures may be varied by the Company for Commercial premises where, in its opinion, the Company is at substantial risk regarding the collection of outstanding arrears.

**Manitoba Hydro/Centra Gas
Gas and Combined Gas/Electric Services Disconnection and Reconnection
Policy and Procedures**

3.0 POLICY:

3.1 The consolidated billing statement may include any individual product or service (gas, electric, loans or other charges) on separate billing statements or any combination of products and services on a single billing statement submitted to the customer by Centra Gas and/or Manitoba Hydro or by Manitoba Hydro on behalf of Centra Gas.

3.2 The Company will normally confine collection activity to the person(s) identified on the account who requested the service(s) with an implied agreement to pay or the person or agency who has agreed to pay for the service(s), with the following exception: where a reasonable person would expect that a customer not named on the bill is implicitly responsible for the service(s), i.e. husband or wife (legal or common-law), that person will also be presumed to have liability for the outstanding balance.

3.3 The Manitoba Hydro/Centra Gas, Gas and Combined Gas/Electric Services Disconnection and Reconnection Policy and Procedures are subject to the Public Utilities Board's (Board) review, approval and supervision. The Company agrees that the Board act as a review body with respect to combined gas/electric service(s) disconnection or reconnection policy and procedures. The Board may, on its own initiative, or at the request of a customer, review the Company's actions and make recommendations with respect to same.

3.4 Every effort will be made by the Company to resolve outstanding accounts, disconnection and reconnection issues directly with its customers. If a solution cannot be reached on a gas or combined gas/electric service(s) disconnection or reconnection, the customer may apply to the Board for dispute resolution.

3.5 Customers may direct payment application to any individual product or service on their consolidated billing statement; however, failure to bring the account to good standing will result in applicable disconnection procedures for gas and/or electric services from May 15 to September 30, or electric limited service at any time during the year.

3.6 Disconnection for non-payment can only occur from May 15 to September 30 on gas and combined gas/electric services in arrears. Disconnection will not occur on gas or combined gas/electric services for occupied residential premises from October 1 to May 14. A "Load Limiter" may be installed at any time except where there is no access or for safety or technical reasons.

3.7 By September 30, where gas is the heat source, gas and combined gas/electric services disconnected for non-payment will be reconnected and the electric service shall be load limited except as provided for in clauses 3.6 and 3.13.

3.8 Load limiters may be maintained until the account returns to good standing. If the customer's consolidated billing statement remains in arrears after May 14 the load limiter may be removed and the gas and/or electric service(s) will be subject to disconnection.

**Manitoba Hydro/Centra Gas
Gas and Combined Gas/Electric Services Disconnection and Reconnection
Policy and Procedures**

<p>3.9 Up to September 30, gas disconnection will occur Mondays to Thursdays and is permissible on Fridays on condition that the Company provides the identical level of customer service between the hours of 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. on the Saturday following any Friday on which disconnection was completed. Customer service shall include responding to telephone inquiries, bill payment services, an opportunity to make payment arrangements and reconnection services.</p>
<p>3.10 If a customer has one billing statement for one or more products or services, arrears will be based on the outstanding account balance regardless of which product or service is in arrears. The gas or combined gas/electric services will be subject to the applicable disconnection procedures.</p>
<p>3.11 If a customer has separate billing statements for a single premise, and one billing statement is in arrears, all services will be subject to applicable disconnection procedures regardless of which billing statement is in arrears.</p>
<p>3.12 If a landlord is responsible for the provision of gas or combined gas/electric services to tenant occupied premises, arrears will be based on the outstanding account balance and will be subject to Residential Tenancy Branch (RTB) procedures at the tenant occupied premises. Landlords failing to bring their outstanding account balance to good standing will be subject to disconnection of services at their personal residence and any vacant premises under the same name.</p>
<p>3.13 At confirmed vacant premises, gas and combined gas/electric services may be disconnected during the heating season. The Company will keep records of all notification efforts and rationale for conclusion that the premises are vacant.</p>
<p>3.14 At suspected vacant premises, where gas or combined gas/electric services have been disconnected for non-payment, the Company will attempt to contact owners or landlords and keep records of all notification efforts. Such premises will be considered occupied until vacancy is confirmed.</p>
<p>3.15 This policy does not affect the Company's right to disconnect in times of emergency and/or for reasons of safety.</p>
<p>3.16 The Company will attempt to notify disconnected gas and combined gas/electric customers in writing or by phone, to advise if full payment or payment arrangements suitable to the Company are not made, electrical service may be load limited by the start of the next heating season.</p>
<p>3.17 Where the customer or any of the permanent residents of the premises appear to be physically incapable of resetting the load limiter or where the Company does not reasonably believe that the customer or any of the other permanent residents notified fully understands the consequences of load limited or disconnected service, the Company will fully reconnect service(s) and contact the appropriate social agency.</p>

**Manitoba Hydro/Centra Gas
Gas and Combined Gas/Electric Services Disconnection and Reconnection
Policy and Procedures**

3.18 The Company will keep current data of all disconnected gas, combined gas/electric and load limited residential customers in accordance with the following procedures.

3.19 The Company may seek Board exemption from full disconnection procedures when faced with customers who consistently and deliberately show patterns of payment avoidance and who clearly understand the consequences of their actions.

4.0 PROCEDURES

4.1 DISCONNECTION PROCEDURE

Steps 1, 2 and 3 must be followed on gas and combined gas/electric services in arrears after which gas and electric disconnection may occur from May 15 to September 30. A load limiter may be installed at any time of the year where the account is in arrears and notice has been provided.

Step 1

Customers shall receive a billing statement each month (first in sequence) for products and services from the previous billing period. The due date which appears on the bill shall be no less than 14 days after the billing date.

Step 2

If payment is not received prior to the next month's bill preparation (second in sequence), a message similar to the following and developed in collaboration with staff of the Board and Manitoba Hydro shall appear on the billing statement:

"Our records indicate your account is past due. Please give this your prompt attention. If payment or payment arrangements have been made, kindly disregard this notice.

[The following is applicable to residential premises including the mixed use residential/non-residential segment.]

"Information on service disconnection, limited electric service, payment arrangements and financial assistance is enclosed."

The Company shall inform the customers about those social service agencies which may be in a position to offer assistance.

Step 3

If payment is not received prior to the preparation of the next month's bill (third in sequence), a message similar to the following and developed in collaboration with staff of the Board and Manitoba Hydro shall appear on the billing statement. Reconnection fees will be charged as approved by the Board from time to time:

**Manitoba Hydro/Centra Gas
Gas and Combined Gas/Electric Services Disconnection and Reconnection
Policy and Procedures**

IMPORTANT PAST DUE NOTICE

Your **account** is past due. If suitable payment arrangements or full payment of the arrears are not made on or before (enter Date {14 calendar days from date of issue}) your account will be subject to collection action which may include limited electric service or full disconnection of service(s). Please call the phone number on the front of your billing statement or pay in person at a Manitoba Hydro Office. If payment of the arrears has already been made, please notify Manitoba Hydro immediately. If payment arrangements have already been made kindly disregard this notice.

If your energy service(s) are limited or disconnected, full payment of the arrears balance plus a reconnect fee for each service will be required before service(s) are fully restored. A security deposit may also be required.

Customers may appeal the Company's action by contacting the Public Utilities Board.

Manitoba Hydro is not responsible for any damages or losses that may occur as a result of energy services which are limited or disconnected for non-payment. Please ensure you protect people, animals and property that may be impacted. Reconnect Fees will range from \$XX to \$XX plus GST.

4.2 Following completion of Steps 1, 2 and 3, disconnection may occur on gas and combined gas/electric services in arrears between May 15 and September 30. A load limiter may be installed once the Company has made contact with the customer to explain the load limiter and how to reset it. Contact may include in person or by telephone.

4.3 The following are exceptions to the above notice requirements before disconnection:

- (a) Where the customer's account was past due and where a payment arrangement was made and subsequently broken, the Company may load limit or disconnect the customer's service with 7 calendar days notice.
- (b) Where the customer's account was past due for products and services billed at a previous premise, the Company may, with 10 days notice, load limit or disconnect the customer's service at the new premise if the customer fails to make a payment arrangement.

4.4 A message similar to the following and developed in collaboration with staff of the Board and Manitoba Hydro shall appear on the billing statement where services have been load limited or fully disconnected:

Your account remains outstanding despite previous requests for payment. Failure to pay the outstanding account balance can jeopardize your credit rating and subject your account to legal action. If your electric service is currently load limited, your service(s) will be subject to full disconnection on or after May 15. Please call the phone number on the front of your billing statement or pay in person at a Manitoba Hydro Office. If payment of the arrears has already been made, please notify Manitoba Hydro immediately. If payment arrangements have already been made kindly disregard this notice.

**Manitoba Hydro/Centra Gas
Gas and Combined Gas/Electric Services Disconnection and Reconnection
Policy and Procedures**

4.5 The load limiter will be removed when the account returns to good standing. If full payment of the arrears or payment arrangements, suitable to the Company, are not made the load limiter may be removed after May 14 and the gas and/or electric service(s) will be subject to disconnection.

4.6 Where the Company discovers unauthorized use of a disconnected or load limited service, the Company may re-establish the load limiter or disconnect the service and install an anti-tampering device, within the terms of this policy and procedures. If the disconnection between October 1 and May 14, the Company will contact the customer prior to full disconnection.

4.7 RECONNECTION PROCEDURE

No reconnection of service(s) shall occur unless full payment of the arrears or payment arrangements are made suitable to the Company including a reconnection fee. Reconnection terms may also include the payment of a security deposit.

For accounts that remain outstanding, where gas is the heat source, gas and electric services which had been disconnected for non-payment will be reconnected by September 30 and the electric service will be restricted with a load limiter.

A reconnection fee will be charged when service(s) are fully reconnected.

Gas and combined gas/electric service(s) will remain disconnected and a load limiter will not be installed under the following conditions:

- (a) Where the Company has attempted reconnection and is not allowed or unable to gain access to the premises; or
- (b) Where the property has been deemed vacant; or
- (c) For safety reasons including threats to the safety or well-being of the Company, its employees or agents; or
- (d) For technical reasons; e.g. A-base meters and the housing of certain meters are not compatible with load limiters.

4.8 The Company will attempt to notify all disconnected gas and combined gas/electric customers in writing or by phone, to advise if full payment or payment arrangements suitable to the Company are not made, electrical service may be load limited by the start of the next heating season.

Where contact occurs the Company must:

- (a) advise that electric service will be limited over the heating season to 15 amps and the consequences of the limited service, and

**Manitoba Hydro/Centra Gas
Gas and Combined Gas/Electric Services Disconnection and Reconnection
Policy and Procedures**

- (b) advise that there is no requirement to maintain limited service at the end of the heating season and both gas and electric service may be fully disconnected, and
- (c) attempt to determine the customer's ability to understand the consequences with respect to load limited service, and
- (d) make a note on the Company record when the Company's representative believes that the customer has understood the consequences, and
- (e) If a load limiter is installed, the Company will provide the customer with a bilingual card explaining the maximum capacity of the load limited service and how to reset the load limiter if the maximum capacity is exceeded. Information provided to the customer will include a contact phone number.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

4.9 LOAD LIMITED SERVICE

The Company shall maintain a record of load limited services which will be made available to the Board upon request.

4.10 DISCONNECTED COMBINED GAS/ELECTRIC SERVICE

The Company shall correspond with the Board on or about September 15th and 30th, October 15th and 30th, November 30th and December 31st. The correspondence shall be in the form of a report entitled "Disconnected Residential Service Report" and will include all residential customers who remain disconnected, indicating:

- (a) Customer Name
- (b) Customer Number
- (c) Premise Number
- (d) Address
- (e) Employer Name
- (f) Total number of occupants on the premises, including persons under the age of 18, and persons who are disabled or elderly
- (g) Home and Work Phone Numbers
- (h) Current Account Balance
- (i) Referral to Social Service Agency
- (j) Referral to Child and Family Services
- (k) Owner/Tenant Code
- (l) Consequences Explained and Understood
- (m) Financial Difficulty
- (n) Disconnection Date Gas
- (o) Disconnection Date Electric

**Manitoba Hydro/Centra Gas
Gas and Combined Gas/Electric Services Disconnection and Reconnection
Policy and Procedures**

- (p) Reconnection Date Gas
- (q) Reconnection Date Electric
- (r) Pending Reconnection Date Gas
- (s) Pending Reconnection Date Electric
- (t) Pending Load Limited Date
- (u) Vacant Date
- (v) Intentional Avoidance Date
- (w) Unavailable Date
- (x) Alternate Heating and Type
- (y) Safety Reasons
- (z) Technical Reasons

4.11 Additionally, the Company shall record the following information which the Board may request at any time:

- (a) payment arrangement details;
- (b) efforts made by the Company to contact the customer (bill messages, letters, telephone calls, personal visits) and the results of such efforts;
- (c) any evidence of customer either contacting, or being encouraged to contact an appropriate social agency;
- (d) if known, details of any follow-up action being undertaken by a social agency;
- (e) information indicating the presence of children, the elderly and the disabled;
- (f) results of title search where done.

Where there are children 12 and under, the matter will be referred in writing to Child and Family Services by September 15 or as soon as the facts are known.

4.12 The Company shall correspond with the Board on a weekly basis from May 15 to December 31, by providing statistical data for disconnected gas and combined gas/electric services. The correspondence shall include:

- (a) Total Disconnected To Date
- (b) Total Reconnected To Date
- (c) Current Week Disconnects
- (d) Current Week Reconnects
- (e) Remaining Disconnected
- (f) Pending Reconnections
- (g) Vacant
- (h) Intentional Avoidance
- (i) Remaining Disconnected
- (j) Face-to-Face Completed

**Manitoba Hydro/Centra Gas
Gas and Combined Gas/Electric Services Disconnection and Reconnection
Policy and Procedures**

4.13 Meetings can be held as needed with the Board and the Company's Credit and Recovery Services Manager or delegate. The purpose of these meetings would be to review specific accounts to ensure that customers' concerns (e.g. health, safety and financial interests) have been considered. The Board may conduct audits on these customers as they deem appropriate.

4.14 The above Policies and Procedures come into effect on February 29, 2008.