

# ENERGY ASSISTANCE FACT SHEET

## Reasons for Suspending Residential Disconnection for Non-Pay

**Weather** – OPPD does not disconnect residential services for non-payment, based on the following weather forecasts:

- Low temperatures below 32 degrees within the following 24 to 48 hours.
- High temperatures above 95 degrees or heat index above 105 degrees within the following 24 to 48 hours.

**Holiday** – Regardless of the temperature, OPPD typically does not disconnect residential services for non-pay during the two weeks that include the Christmas and New Year's Day holidays. There are also no disconnects the day before a national holiday.

Furthermore, OPPD personnel are skilled at identifying severe hardship cases and may accommodate exceptions.

## Payment Plans

- If a customer is having difficulties paying the amount of their disconnect notice, they may call OPPD's Customer Service and a representative will work with the customer to set up a payment plan for their unpaid balance.
- Payment plans may be used to extend the due date of the disconnect notice up to five business days after date of Disconnect Notice or to pay a lesser amount than the amount on the Disconnect Notice.
- Payment plans may be granted with medical documentation.
- In some instances, customers may not be eligible for a payment plan, based on their payment history.

## OPPD Energy Assistance Program (EAP)

- EAP was established by OPPD in 1988 and is currently administered by the Common Fund of the Heartland.
- The EAP fund is available to cover the emergency energy-related needs of households located within OPPD's 13-county service area, based on eligibility criteria and availability of funds.
- EAP has distributed over \$5 million to assist customers since its inception.

- In 2018, OPPD's EAP fund distributed nearly \$231,500 to 882 households through Common Fund.
- If customers need help paying utility bills, the first step is to contact 2-1-1, which is managed by United Way and connects eligible customers with available funds through Common Fund.

## Guidelines for assistance eligibility through OPPD's EAP

Individuals eligible for assistance are those who are experiencing an acute financial crisis due to a verifiable emergency (illness, death, lay-off, etc.) and who have exhausted alternative resources.

Eligibility criteria and guidelines are determined, verified and administered by each EAP agency partner and generally include the following:

1. An emergency situation occurs, such as:
  - a. Non-regular expenses occurred which depleted the usual financial reserves, e.g., illness depleting financial reserves;
  - b. A medical condition occurred requiring continuous utility use as verified by a doctor; or
  - c. A job layoff with pending benefits.
2. The head of household or spouse is 62 years of age or older, or there is a verified need for initial utility deposit (provided if/when funds available).
3. There are insufficient family and/or community resources to meet their needs. A payment plan has been designed to meet future energy bills.
4. A maximum of \$300 can be paid during any calendar year for each eligible individual/household.
5. Applicants need to have made three payments, or the equivalent of three payments, during the previous six-month period prior to making the application; otherwise, OPPD's prior consent shall be required to approve payments.



6. Applicant's efforts to contact the utility to work out payment arrangements will be considered.
7. Applicants must provide:
  - a. Verified information to complete the casework process, which will lead to a decision regarding assistance that can be provided through EAP, such as: doctor's statement of medical equipment use and need;
  - b. Signed release for applicant's confidential information; and
  - c. Verification of income and budget information.

### LIHEAP/Other Energy Assistance Funds

- LIHEAP (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program) in Nebraska is funded through a federal block grant. The annual income limit for the program is 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). OPPD receives heating, cooling, crisis, and deposit assistance payments on behalf of eligible households.
- Other agencies (Goodfellows, Douglas County General Assistance, St. Vincent DePaul, and many other charitable organizations, churches, etc.) provide energy assistance on behalf of OPPD's customers. OPPD provides designated personnel at agencies (which have signed a non-disclosure agreement with OPPD) with the customer's payment information and status of service related to a disconnection for non-payment.
- Eligibility guidelines for almost all of the agencies usually include three monthly payments within the last six months (excluding assistance), and the customer is required to show economic hardship.

### 2018 Energy Assistance for OPPD Customers

Assistance Program	Households Helped	Amount Distributed
LIHEAP	8,294	\$ 4,139,657
Other Agencies/Sources	2,783	\$ 853,754
Common Fund	882	\$ 231,574
Total	10,816*	\$ 5,224,985
* Total less than sum because some households receive payments from multiple assistance programs		

### Low-Usage, Low-Income (LULI) Bill Credit

OPPD developed a transitional bill credit program to assist low-usage, low-income customers most impacted by the 2016 rate restructuring efforts. Low-usage customers are most impacted because the fixed portion of the bill is increasing to reflect the fixed costs associated with providing electric service, despite the fact the per-kwh charge for energy is decreasing.

The LULI Bill Credit program is being offered from the inception of the rate restructuring through 2020.

	Service Charge Proposed	LULI Credit
Jun 1, 2016	\$15.00	\$2.50
Jun 1, 2017	\$20.00	\$5.00
Jun 1, 2018	\$25.00	\$7.50
Jun 1, 2019	\$30.00	\$7.50
Jun 1, 2020*	\$30.00	\$5.00

\* LULI Credit no longer available after 2020

### Qualification for LULI Bill Credit

- Energy usage below 600 kwh in a given month and
- Income qualification through the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

Customers can apply for LIHEAP through the Department of Health and Human Services' (DHHS) website, by phone or at DHHS walk-in-service locations. In addition, there are over 30 social service agencies that help customers with the LIHEAP application process.

Once LIHEAP-qualified, the customer's usage will be evaluated each month for 12 months to determine if they are eligible for a credit under this transitional program. Customers must qualify for LIHEAP annually to receive the credit.

### Smart Steps

*Smart Steps to Saving Energy* is a multi-phase program for OPPD's customers that provides education and assistance for managing energy use.

- Customers must attend an educational workshop on managing energy use, during which they will receive a *Smart Steps* toolkit with weatherization items.
- From the workshops, income-qualified (family income is below 150% of poverty level) customers will receive an in-home energy assessment, education and assistance installing toolkit items.
- Income-qualified homeowners also may receive up to \$1,000 in expanded energy-efficiency measures.

Those interested in attending a workshop can email [smartsteps@oppd.com](mailto:smartsteps@oppd.com) for a schedule or additional information.