



# PAST DUE WATER BILL POLICY

City of Torrance  
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Effective: January 1, 2022

## Purpose

This policy describes the City's process for handling past due bills including notifications, late penalties, disconnections, reconnections, alternative payment arrangements and special circumstances (low income residents and residents with a medical need for water).

In April 2020, Governor Newsom signed an executive order that restricted water shutoffs to homes and small businesses in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This order expired in September 2021. For the last two years, Torrance Municipal Water has not discontinued water service due to non-payment, however, we are now resuming our previous practice to assess late fees for accounts that are over 30 days past due and to discontinue water service to those accounts with a past due balance over 60 days.

## Notifications

The City will provide a notice to customers of delinquency and pending termination via mailed notices, door tags and/or telephone calls. The City will make a reasonable, good faith effort to contact the customer of pending disconnection by mail, phone or notification at the premises no less than 10 business days prior to disconnection. Customers will receive a disconnection notice or door tag notice for water bills that are past due by more than forty-five (45) days.

## Late Penalties

Customers incur a three percent (3%) late fee for payments not received by the date indicated on the bill.

## Disconnections

Customers with water charges more than sixty (60) days past due may be disconnected and a reconnection fee will apply before service can be restored. To prevent disconnections, customers must remit the full payment due at least one (1) business day before the scheduled disconnection date. Customers may qualify for a payment arrangement to prevent disconnection.

Residential customers may request an exemption from being disconnected if all of the following applies:

- Medical advice that disconnection of the customer's water would pose a serious health risk.
- The customer must be willing to enter into a payment arrangement.

## Reconnections and Reconnection Fees

Customers can have their water service reconnected by paying the past due amount, including late penalties and a reconnection fee. Customers can also have their water service reconnected by making an alternative payment arrangement. If you mail a payment for a disconnected service, your water service will not be reconnected until your payment has been received and posted to your account.

- Reconnections scheduled for the same day, after business hours or the next day are charge a fee of \$52.00.

## Alternative Payment Arrangements

Any customer who is unable to pay for water charges, within the normal payment period may request a payment arrangement to avoid disruption of service.

The City will grant a payment arrangement, including but not limited to, alternative payment schedules, deferred payments and minimum payments as specified in this policy for any customer who does not already have an active payment arrangement or a prior payment arrangement for the same past due charges, for which the terms of the agreement were not met and subsequently terminated.

Requirements to make a payment arrangement:

- Requests must be made at least one business day before the scheduled disconnection date.
- Customers may establish a payment amount and only one payment arrangement can be active at the same time.
- Customers must agree to comply with the terms of the payment agreement verbally over the phone or in writing, comply with the terms of their payment arrangement and remain current as charges accrue in each subsequent billing period.

- Payment arrangements cannot be longer than twelve (12) months.
- **Missed payments will void your payment arrangement and the entire outstanding balance will become due in order to prevent disconnection.**

Requirements for customers in a payment arrangement:

- Customers may not request an additional payment arrangement plan for any subsequent unpaid charges while paying delinquent charges to an existing payment arrangement.

Due date extensions:

- Customers may request a due date extension if the request is made no later than one (1) business day before the scheduled disconnection date and they are not already in a payment arrangement.

A customer who enters into and abides by a payment arrangement shall not be considered delinquent. Failure to comply with the terms of a payment arrangement will result in the customer being considered delinquent. The customer will then be subject to disconnection once the account is delinquent for 60 days and additional arrangements or extensions will not be available for any new delinquent balance, and the customer will not be granted future alternative payment arrangements until the delinquent balance has been paid.

### **Low income (Residential Customers Only)**

Customers can qualify for special provisions if they are enrolled in the rate assistance program.

To be eligible for the rate assistance program, households must meet the following criteria:

- Have a total gross household income no greater than \$32,200 for the prior calendar year, and
- Be a minimum of 62 years of age or permanently disabled
- Complete the UUT exemption application for Low Income Senior or Low income permanently disabled form.
- Customers are required to re-submit an application every two years.

Special Provisions:

- Customers who qualify are exempt from utility user tax charges on water charges.
- Customers are eligible to receive water, sewer and trash charges at a discounted rate.

### **Medical Waiver**

Customers can demonstrate a medical need for water if they can provide a written certification from their primary care provider that discontinuation of water service will be life threatening to, or pose a serious threat to the health and safety of, a resident of the premises where water service is provided.

### **Landlord/Tenant relationships**

If you are renting a property that has an individual meter under the property owner's name, and the account is past due; tenants have the right to become customers.

- In order to waive the past due amount, the tenant shall provide a copy of a lease/rental agreement, rent receipts or government document indicating he/she is renting the property as verification.
- A tenant who chooses to become the customer can deduct water charges from periodic payments, such as rental payments to the property owner, if water charges are not separately stated.

### **Appeal process**

Customers may dispute their monthly water bill by submitting a water bill protest form within fifteen (15) days from the bill date. The City shall review appeals and investigate as needed. All decisions are made by the Hearing Officer or designee. Water service shall not be discontinued while the appeal is pending.