

YOUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES AS A CUSTOMER OF

Belfast Water District

**285 Northport Avenue
P.O. Box 506, Belfast, Maine 04915**

**Business Office Phone
(207) 338-1200**

**Emergency Service & After Hours Phone
(207) 338-2420**

Fax (207) 338-0444

E-Mail: info@belfastwater.org

Business Hours

7:00 am – 3:30 pm Monday thru Friday

(excluding holidays)

Approved June 28, 2010

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PLEASE KEEP THIS DOCUMENT

We welcome you as a valued customer of the Belfast Water District. This document is provided for our existing and new customers. It contains a summary of your rights and responsibilities as required under Chapter 660 of the Maine Public Utilities Commission (MPUC).

The purposes of this Chapter are:

- ☐ To assure safe and adequate provision of utility service;
- ☐ To assure that service is not disconnected or refused unreasonably;
and
- ☐ To assure the utility's right to collect proper bills for utility service.

Every privilege that is granted and every duty that is required by this Chapter imposes an obligation on utilities, applicants and customers to accept these privileges and perform these duties with good faith, honesty and fairness.

Throughout this document, the terms "we" or "us" refer to the Belfast Water District. The term "you" refers to the applicant or customer.

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APPLICATION FOR SERVICE

No Discrimination Allowed

When you apply for service from us, we will treat you fairly. You are required to *complete an application form and answer some important questions before we accept you as a customer. A service application fee of \$15.00 is payable at time of application, each time you sign for service, for each service location address. If you fail to complete the application process, service may be denied or disconnected.*

No matter what country you come from, what sex or race you are, whether you are single or married, young or old, we will either agree to provide the service you ask for or deny it within three (3) business days after you ask for the service.

If we deny service, we will send you the reasons in writing and inform you what you can do.

In signing for the service, you agree to abide by the District's approved Terms and Conditions. You are also responsible for notifying us to terminate water service and for providing complete information for a final bill. In multi-unit buildings, tenants are allowed to sign for service only if there is a permanently accessible shut-off for each unit.

Cost of Service

When you apply for service, we will tell you about the basic minimum service costs and one-time costs such as installation fees and how much they are, if applicable.

If you have any questions about the cost of your service or the difference between the basic service and optional services, call us at (207) 338-1200.

Our rates must be approved by the Maine Public Utilities Commission. We cannot change these rates without the approval of the MPUC. You have the right to review and comment on our proposed rates before the MPUC approves or disapproves any changes.

Old Unpaid Bills

When you apply for service, we will check to see if you have had service with us before. If you have an unpaid bill, we will ask you to pay it or make a payment arrangement. We are allowed to request payment of bills that are up to six (6) years old. We cannot ask you to pay anyone else's bills -- only those bills in your name or bills a court has said you are responsible for.

If you dispute the old bill or you are unable to agree with us about a reasonable payment plan, see the "Complaint" section on page 11.

Scheduling

We require a minimum of two business-day notice to turn on a service or set a water meter, unless the service has been disconnected for non-payment. We require a minimum three business-day notice to discontinue service; termination of service may involve removal of the meter. These services are available during our business hours, and someone must be on the premises when we turn the water on or remove the meter.

DEPOSITS

We can ask for a deposit only if there is some proof that you will be a credit risk, that is, that you may not pay your future bills. In most cases, "proof that you will be a credit risk" is shown if you have an unpaid bill when you apply for service or you have been disconnected for nonpayment, unauthorized use or theft of services.

These are not all the situations in which we can require a deposit. You have the right to show us evidence that you can and will pay your future bills and avoid a deposit request.

When We Require a Deposit

- ☐ We must inform you in writing.
- ☐ We must tell you what you can do to begin or continue service.
- ☐ You can ask for proof that you are a credit risk.
- ☐ We will tell you what to do if you disagree with the deposit request or amount.
- ☐ We will pay interest on your deposit.
- ☐ We will give you a choice between a cash deposit and allowing another person to "guarantee" your bills to the deposit amount. The guarantor must be a customer in good standing with us.

Deposit Amount; Payment Options

We can require a deposit that is equal to your anticipated bills for two quarters. You can usually have a choice to pay the deposit in full or in three (3) payments, with half the total due immediately, 25% in 30 days and 25% in 60 days. However, we may require a full payment of a deposit if you are already using a payment plan to pay off an unpaid bill. We will return your deposit if you pay your bills on time for 12 consecutive months. Interest on your deposit will be credited on your quarterly or monthly bill. Non-residential deposits are refunded at termination of service. We will pay interest on deposits as set by the Maine Public Utilities Commission.

BILLS

Billing Schedules

We mail bills quarterly. We reserve the right to bill monthly. Domestic water use is billed in arrears. Public and private fire protection charges will be billed in advance each year on a quarterly basis.

Proration of Bills

Initial and final bills will be pro-rated against Belfast Water District's approved tariffs and the number of service days in the billing period.

Water consumption

Water bills are based on water consumption, measured by a water meter in your basement or utility closet. Most locations are equipped with meters which can be read from the outside of the building.

Water Charges

Most residential locations are equipped with a 5/8-inch meter. Currently, the minimum quarterly charge for this size meter is \$67.28. Under the minimum charge, you are allowed up to 12 hundred cubic feet, and the water charge is \$2.15 per hundred cubic feet thereafter. One hundred cubic feet of water is approximately 748 gallons.

Estimated Bills

We will try to send you a bill based on your actual usage, but we can send you estimated bills for service. We will not send you two (2) estimated bills in a row, except during extreme weather conditions, emergencies, work stoppages or similar circumstances that would prevent our employees from reading your meter.

Make-up Bills

If we have to issue a make-up bill for past service that you were not billed for, we will offer you a payment plan. If the reason for the make-up bill is our fault (equipment failure or our billing error, for example), you will be billed for only one (1) year of past service even if the billing mistake was for a longer time.

Previous Bills

Upon request, we will give you a record of your water usage.

Third-party Notice of Bills and Notices

Notify our office if you want another person to get a copy of any bill or disconnection notice we send you. We will send a copy to the person you designate, but you are still responsible for payment. This service may be especially important for our elderly, disabled and handicapped customers.

Water Questions

If you have any questions about the cost of water service, you can call us at 207-338-1200. Our water rates must be approved by the MPUC and we cannot change these rates without approval of the MPUC. You have the right to review and comment on the proposed rates before the MPUC rules.

Accuracy of Meters

We test our water meters according to the schedule and standards established by the Maine Public Utilities Commission Chapter 620. If you want your meter tested for accuracy, we will do so at no extra cost to you. If you ask more often than once every 18 months, we will charge you a reasonable fee for this test. You have the right to be present when the meter is tested, but you have to make an appointment.

You can check the accuracy of your bill and monitor your own usage by reading the meter yourself. Call and ask us for information on how to read your meter.

Payments

You should pay your bill as soon as possible. Water bills are considered past due and begin accruing interest not less than 25 days from mailing. If you mail your payment to us, your bill is considered paid on the day we receive it. If you come to our office, your bill is considered paid on the day you make the payment. If you make a partial payment, we will apply it to the oldest balance due.

You can pay your bill by mail: Belfast Water District, P.O. Box 506, Belfast, ME 04915

or in person: at Belfast Water District, 285 Northport Avenue, Belfast, ME

or On Line Bill Payment on our website: www.belfastwater.org You can pay by electronic check for a \$0.40 cents convenience fee or you can pay by credit/debit card for a \$2.95 convenience fee. ~~Credit or debit cards are not accepted at the water district office.~~

We accept payment by cash, check or money order. When a check is not honored by the bank, we will charge you the greater of \$5.00 or the bank charge. If you have more than one returned check, we may require you to pay by cash or certified check/money order only.

Financial Assistance

Low income customers may qualify for assistance to pay a utility bill. We can help refer you to available programs but the best source of information is your local Community Action Agency. Call the Citizens Assistance Line at the Division of Community Assistance (1-800-452-4617) for the name and number of your local agency. You can also call 211 or visit that website at www.211maine.org

PAYMENT PLANS

We will continue service even if you can't pay your account in full, as long as you pay a reasonable portion of your bill and you agree to pay the rest in affordable weekly or monthly payments. You must also agree to pay all future bills within 30 days of the postmark until the overdue amount is paid in full.

We will consider the following issues when establishing a payment plan:

- ☐ Your ability to pay.
- ☐ Your previous payment history.
- ☐ The reason why the bill can't be paid.
- ☐ How long the bill has remained unpaid.
- ☐ Whether disconnection would pose a danger to your household.

We will send you a written copy of the payment arrangement.

If you do not make payments according to a written payment plan, we can send you a disconnection notice that gives you three (3) business days to pay the full overdue amount. We are not required to make a second arrangement, but we will try to respond to your particular situation.

You do not have to agree to a payment plan or any other proposed settlement of a dispute if doing so means giving up your other rights listed in this document. Contact our business office for payment plans.

DISCONNECTION

We don't want to disconnect your service. We will work with you to resolve problems. However, if a customer refuses to cooperate, we have the right to start disconnection procedures when:

- ☐ You fail to pay or make a payment plan for an overdue bill.
- ☐ You don't keep a written payment plan.
- ☐ You fail to pay a deposit, arrange to pay for it or provide someone who is willing to

guarantee payment.

- ☐ You refuse to let us onto your property to install or read a meter or inspect or repair company property.
- ☐ You have tampered with the meter, made it inaccessible or somehow managed to obtain service without payment.
- ☐ You misrepresented who you are to get service.
- ☐ You fail to comply with a decision of the Maine Public Utilities Commission or its Consumer Assistance Division.
- ☐ You have a cross connection violation.
- ☐ You fail to apply for water service.
- ☐ Abandonment of service
- ☐ Your check is returned for non-sufficient funds.

We Are Not Allowed to Disconnect For:

- ☐ Non-basic service charges, such as for merchandise or services not regulated by the Maine Public Utilities Commission.
- ☐ An old bill that was not properly transferred to your account when you applied for service.
- ☐ Estimated usage. But we can disconnect if you have refused to allow us to read a meter or you have refused to provide an actual reading on our form.

We will not disconnect if you or a doctor notify us that a serious medical condition exists. (see page 10).

If you are a tenant and if your landlord asks us to disconnect or if your landlord does not pay the bill, we will issue you a tenant notice and opportunity to apply for service in your own name. You do **not** have to pay the landlord's unpaid bill.

Disconnect Notice

In most cases, we will notify you in writing at least 14 days before a stated disconnection date. But we can give you only three (3) business-day notice if you've broken a payment plan, failed to pay a deposit, paid with a bad check or received service without applying to become a customer or abandonment of service. We can disconnect without notice **only** if there is unauthorized use (meter tampering) or a dangerous condition.

A disconnection notice is good for ten (10) business days after the disconnection date stated on it.

The disconnection notice will tell you what to do to avoid disconnection and how you can dispute your bill or the disconnection itself.

We will not disconnect service on a Friday, a weekend, a legal holiday, the day before a holiday or on any day our office is not open for business.

RECONNECTION/NON-PAYMENT

We must reconnect service again promptly -- during the business hours on the same day you ask, or at the latest during the next business day -- provided you have paid your overdue bill or have agreed to a payment plan.

If your water service is disconnected for non-payment we will charge you a \$60.00 reconnection fee during normal business hours of 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. During holidays and other than normal business hours, the charge will be \$90.00. During winter conditions from December 15th thru March 31st the charge will be \$90.00 during normal business hours of 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. During holidays and other than normal business hours, the charge will be \$135.00

If our service crew calls at your premises to collect an overdue payment, we will charge you a \$30.00 collection trip fee.

We can also require a deposit equal to two billing periods if you are disconnected for nonpayment, unauthorized use or theft of service. When both a deposit and the unpaid bill are required, you can pay the smaller amount in full and enter a payment plan on the larger amount. ~~See page 3 for fees charged for reconnection.~~

MEDICAL EMERGENCIES

We will not disconnect service or refuse to reconnect it when you or someone in your house is seriously ill, provided a registered physician confirms that an emergency exists. If you cannot get a doctor to call right away, you may let us know yourself. We will wait three (3) business days for the doctor to call us. We require written certification within 7 days from the doctor, including specific reasons why service is necessary and how long the emergency will last. Disconnection can be postponed due to a medical emergency for up to 30 days. A certification may be renewed a total of two times during any 12 month period.

A medical emergency does not cancel the bill. We will refer you to financial assistance agencies and ask you to negotiate a reasonable payment plan.

INTERRUPTION OF SERVICE

We may need to interrupt your service on occasion to repair or maintain our equipment. When possible, we will let you know why and how long you can expect to be without service.

If we plan to interrupt service to more than ten (10) customers or for more than three (3) hours, we must give you a notice of at least 24 hours. We will give you more notice whenever possible. If your service must be interrupted without notice for more than three (3) hours due to storms or other emergencies, we will try to let you know as soon as possible how long you are likely to be without service.

If being without service would pose a danger to any member of your household (presence of a life support system, for example), notify us. We will put you on a priority list to restore service as soon as possible.

LIABILITY AND ABATEMENT FOR INTERRUPTED SERVICE

We are not responsible for damage caused by discolored water or unsatisfactory water service resulting from the cleaning of pipes or storage facilities; or from the opening or closing of any valves or hydrants; unless the damage was caused by our lack of reasonable care. We are also not responsible for meeting unusually high water quality standards for specializing or industrial customers.

You may apply for a pro-rated reduction on your minimum bill if your service is interrupted for more than 48 hours through no fault of your own.

Please contact our office for information about interrupted or unsatisfactory service.

COMPLAINTS

If you have any questions or complaints, call us. We will have at least one employee available during business hours to answer your questions, set up payment plans and resolve disputes. We will investigate your complaint and try to resolve it.

If you disagree with our answer, you have a right to appeal to the Consumer Assistance Division (CAD) of the Maine Public Utilities Commission, 18 State House Station, Augusta, Maine 04333-0018. You can call the CAD at 287-3831 or toll free at 800-452-4699. Before you call or write the Commission, you must give us the opportunity to respond to your complaint.

We cannot disconnect you for a disputed amount, but you do have to pay the portion of the bill that is not in dispute. If you contact us before the service is disconnected and we cannot agree on a payment plan or other requirement to stop disconnection, you can appeal to the MPUC as described above.

Water Rates (January 1, 2015):

\$67.28 quarterly minimum (5/8" meter) based on 12 hundred cubic feet

\$2.15 per 1 hundred cubic feet after first 12 hundred cubic feet

(1 cubic foot equals 7.48 gallons)

(100 cubic feet equals 748 gallons)