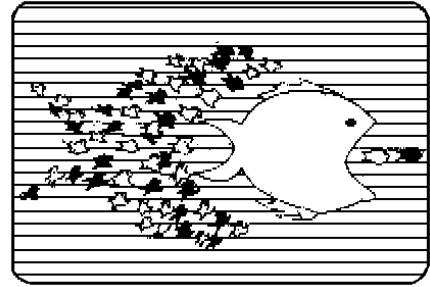


**The  
British Columbia  
Public Interest  
Advocacy Centre**

#208 - 1090 West Pender Street  
Vancouver, B.C. V6E 2N7  
Tel: (604) 687-3063 Fax: (604) 682-7896  
email: [bcpiac@bcpiac.com](mailto:bcpiac@bcpiac.com)  
<http://www.bcpiac.com>



## **BC HYDRO FACT SHEET**

**This fact sheet describes your rights and responsibilities to help you advocate for yourself and for others. It is based on the BC Hydro Electric Tariff, which sets out the terms and conditions of your contract for service with BC Hydro.**

**Throughout this Fact Sheet, we have referenced the page numbers to Section B – Terms and Conditions of the Electric Tariff in square brackets, i.e. [B-20]. The Electric Tariff can be found at [http://www.bchydro.com/rx\\_files/policies/policies1459.pdf](http://www.bchydro.com/rx_files/policies/policies1459.pdf)**

**We have reviewed the sheet with BC Hydro to ensure it is accurate.**

### **BC Hydro Contact Information**

#### **General Inquiries**

In Greater Vancouver: 604-224-9376  
Other areas, toll free: 1-800-BCHYDRO (1-800-224-9376)

This number offers automated service in English, French, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean and Punjabi, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Representatives are available Monday to Friday, 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. and Saturday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (Pacific Time).

#### **Emergencies & Power Outages**

1-888-POWERON (1-888-769-3766) all areas

**Website:** [www.bchydro.com](http://www.bchydro.com)

You can enroll for or check your account online by visiting the web site at [www.bchydro.com/accountonline](http://www.bchydro.com/accountonline).

## **Applying for electricity service**

### **Do I have to set up my own electricity service?**

Yes, unless you are renting. If you rent, your landlord might pay BC Hydro direct for the power you consume. Talk to your landlord to find out whether or not you need to pay BC Hydro. Note that your landlord cannot charge you more for electricity than you would pay directly to BC Hydro. [B-20]

### **Who do I contact?**

To apply for a new account or modify an existing account, phone BC Hydro at 604-224-9376 (Lower Mainland) or 1 800 224-9376 (outside Lower Mainland), or apply online at [www.bchydro.com/services/applymodify](http://www.bchydro.com/services/applymodify).

### **What do I need to do?**

When you apply for service, BC Hydro may require you to do any of the following:

- complete and sign a service agreement [B-4]
- provide identification acceptable to BC Hydro [B-4]
- provide information acceptable to BC Hydro (usually for a credit check) [B-4]
- provide references [B-26]
- provide a security deposit (see below) [B-32 to B-32-3]

Note that even if you have not signed an application or a contract with BC Hydro, a contract is established if you start using electricity. [B-4]

### **Is there a charge to set up service?**

You are required to pay a \$10 + GST **account charge** when you move or set up a new account. [B-6, B-26, B-38]. Note that you do not have to pay an account charge if you are just changing your account from your spouse's name to your name due to separation, divorce or death and are at the same address. [B-26 to B-27]

### **Does BC Hydro require advance notice to open my account?**

BC Hydro requires at least 24 hours notice in order to open or transfer an account.

### **What do I need to do before I move out of my home?**

When you move out of your current home, you must give BC Hydro at least 24 hours notice before you leave. If you do not tell BC Hydro that you will be leaving your home, you could be held responsible for electricity that is used or damage that is done to BC Hydro's property (such as the meter) after you leave. [B-27]

### **What do I do if my house is not connected?**

If your home is not currently connected to BC Hydro's distribution system (for example, if it is a brand new house), you will also have to pay a **service connection charge**, which includes a service connection and a meter. The amount of the service connection charge will depend on the type of electrical service being connected, and whether or not a BC Hydro technician is required to work outside of normal hours. [B-6, B-37]. If BC Hydro has to extend its distribution system to reach your home (for example, if new power lines must be built down a road to reach your house), there could be further costs to you. [B-6, B-10 to B-13-2]. You will also require an electrical permit, normally completed by your electrician, before your home can be connected to BC Hydro's system.

### **Who do I contact if my house is not connected?**

Phone BC Hydro at 1-877-520-1355  
or visit the Get Connected web site at: [www.bchydro.com/getconnected](http://www.bchydro.com/getconnected).

### **Security Deposits**

#### **Will I have to pay a security deposit?**

If you are a new customer who has not established satisfactory credit, or if you are an existing customer who has not maintained a satisfactory payment history, BC Hydro will ask you to choose one of the following options to secure your account:

1. Provide a security deposit (B32 – B32-2)
2. Provide a credit reference letter from another utility or telephone company that confirms you have good credit history with them.
3. Give BC Hydro permission to obtain credit information from a credit reporting agency which confirms you have an overall good credit history
4. Participate in Pay as You Go Billing (see below)

If you are already participating in Pay As You Go Billing and you do not maintain a good payment history, BC Hydro can require you to continue on that program *as well* as providing a security deposit. [B-32-2]

#### **How much will the security deposit be?**

If you are billed for electricity on a monthly basis, the security deposit will be equal to two times your maximum estimated monthly consumption. If you are being billed bi-monthly, the security deposit will be equal to three times your maximum estimated monthly consumption. [B-32 to B-32-2]

### **When will my security deposit be returned?**

BC Hydro will return your security deposit to you once you have maintained an account and paid every amount due on time for one year from the date the deposit was received. [B-32-2]

### **What will happen to my security deposit if I do not pay a bill on time?**

A security deposit is held to secure the account and is applied against the final invoice, if any amount is still owing. Bills are expected to be paid by the due date and BC Hydro does not take part of the security deposit to pay the outstanding bill. [B-32-2]

### **Will my security deposit earn interest?**

Your security deposit, if paid in cash, will earn interest and this interest will be shown on each invoice issued to you. [B-32-2 to B-32-3]

## **Billing**

### **How will I be billed for electricity?**

BC Hydro has three types of billing arrangements: “Regular Billing”, “Equal Payment Plan” And “Pay as You Go Billing.”

### **What is Regular Billing?**

BC Hydro will bill you for the amount of electricity you use, which is measured by a meter connected to your home. Usually, a representative from BC Hydro will read the meter once every two months. If, for any reason, BC Hydro is unable to read your meter, they will estimate your bill, and your next bill will be adjusted if the estimation is too low or too high. [B-22-24]

### **What is the Equal Payment Plan Payment?**

If BC Hydro is satisfied with your credit history, you can choose to sign up for the Equal Payment Plan. Under this plan, BC Hydro will bill you in equal monthly installments that are based on an estimation of consumption over the previous twelve months (B-31).

### **What are the advantages of the Equal Payment Plan?**

This Plan may make it easier to budget for your monthly expenses because your electricity bill will be the same each month for one full year. However, if your consumption is higher than the monthly instalments invoiced during the year, BC Hydro may increase your monthly installment amount to try to avoid a large amount owing at the Plan’s anniversary month.

### **What if I use a different amount of electricity than BC Hydro estimated?**

At the end of the 12-month period, you may have to pay extra, or BC Hydro may have to credit your account, depending on how the estimate compared with the amount of electricity you actually consumed. [B-32] If you have a credit at the anniversary month, this will be applied to your account or you can request a refund cheque mailed to you.

### **What is Pay As You Go Billing?**

If BC Hydro is not satisfied with your payment history, or you are a new customer who has not established satisfactory credit, BC Hydro can require that you pay by Pay As You Go Billing. Pay As You Go Billing means that each month, BC Hydro will bill you in advance for your estimated electricity use the next month. For example, in March, you would have to pay your electricity bill for the month of April. [B-32]

### **What if I have paid all of my bills for the past year?**

If you have paid all of your bills by the due date for one full year, you are entitled to stop paying by Pay As You Go Billing, and to request a different billing option. [B-32-2]

### **Ways to Pay**

#### **How can I pay my bill?**

You can pay your BC Hydro bill in any of the following ways:

1. Financial institutions – You can pay your bill at automated teller machines, over the internet or in person at your bank or credit union.
2. Pay-by-Phone – If your financial institution offers this service, you can pay your bill by phone.
3. Pre-authorized Payment – You can arrange with BC Hydro to pay your bill using pre-authorized, automatic withdrawals from your bank account. **The advantage of paying your bills in this way is that you are entitled to a 0.75% discount on your bill.** This is called “Pre-authorized Payment with Discount.” [B-33] The discount does not apply to Equal Payment Plan with Preauthorized Payment Plan or Regular Billing with Preauthorized Payment Plan. It only applies to accounts that are set up on Pay As You Go with Preauthorized Payment. (B-33).
4. Mail – Mail your cheque to: BC Hydro, PO Box 9501 STN Terminal, Vancouver, BC, V6B 4N1.
5. Payment Services Partners – You can pay your BC Hydro bill at some Pharmasave locations throughout BC. Call your local Pharmasave to find out if it provides this service or access BC Hydro via website [www.bchydro.com/services](http://www.bchydro.com/services) under Ways to Pay.
6. Government Agents – Outside the Lower Mainland, you can pay using cash, cheque, or debit card, with no service fee, at Government Agents of BC. To find out where the closest Government Agent’s office is, call Enquiry BC at 1-800-

663-7867, or access BC Hydro's website at [www.bchydro.com/services](http://www.bchydro.com/services) under Ways to Pay.

7. Credit Card – You can use your credit card to pay your bill online through a service called “Spectrapay,” which charges a fee. See the BC Hydro website for more information, or call 1-800-224-9376.

### **Disconnection or Refusal**

#### **Can BC Hydro cut off my electricity, or refuse to connect me?**

BC Hydro may refuse to provide service or may discontinue service without notice to any customer who:

1. fails to pay for electrical service at any residence
2. breaches the terms and conditions of their contract with BC Hydro
3. refuses to provide reference information and identification acceptable to BC Hydro, either when applying for service or at any subsequent time
4. lives with someone who has unpaid bills, if those bills were incurred while the two people were living together [B-26]

#### **Can BC Hydro suspend or terminate my service for other reasons?**

BC Hydro can suspend or terminate service without notice for any of the following reasons:

1. To prevent fraudulent use of electricity
2. To protect its property
3. To protect service to other customers
4. If the customer fails to comply with the terms of their contract with BC Hydro
5. If the government orders BC Hydro to do so [B-27]

#### **Is there a charge for reconnection?**

Prior to your power being reconnected, you will be required to pay the overdue balance including any outstanding security deposit balance plus a **minimum reconnection charge**. [B-8] BC Hydro does not guarantee same day reconnection if you are disconnected. Minimum reconnection charges are as follows (these vary according to whether you live in an urban or remote location):

- |          |  |
|----------|--|
| \$64.00  | If the customer request for reconnection allows BC Hydro to make the reconnection during regular working hours |
| \$91.00  | If the customer request for reconnection requires BC Hydro to make the reconnection on overtime                |
| \$217.00 | If the customer request for reconnection requires BC Hydro to make the reconnection on a call out              |

## **Problems with paying bills**

### **What if I can't pay my bill?**

Maintain regular contact with BC Hydro if you are having trouble paying your bill. If any payment arrangements are made to assist you with paying the balance due, ensure that you follow through on your commitments to avoid further collection action.

#### **Follow these tips:**

- If you can, make larger payments during the summer while you are using less electricity
- Consider going on Equal Payment Plan billing or Pay As You Go billing
- Make changes around your home to conserve electricity (see below)

## **Late payment fees and other charges**

### **What if my cheque bounces?**

BC Hydro will charge you a fee for each dishonoured cheque. The fee is approximately \$20. [B-38]

### **What if I pay my bill after the due date?**

If you do not pay your bill by the due date, and the unpaid amount is \$30 or more, BC Hydro will charge you a **late payment charge** of 1.5% per month (19.6% annually). [B-25-3 and B-38] BC Hydro has the discretion to waive the late payment charge in some circumstances. The late payment charge will be added to your bill. Late payment charges do not apply to customers being billed under "Equal Payment Plan" or "Pay As You Go Billing, (see above), or any customers who pay their bills by pre-authorized bank debits. [B-25-3] It is important to remember that even though a late payment charge has been billed, BC Hydro still considers the account to be overdue and you are subject to collection action.

## **BC Hydro and BC Employment and Assistance**

If you are on BC Employment and Assistance, BC Hydro has a particular policy that will apply to you.

### **What if I am on welfare, and I cannot pay the amount I owe?**

When a BCEA recipient cannot pay the total amount owing, and therefore faces having their electricity disconnected (or not reconnected), the customer's financial assistance worker and BC Hydro can take the following actions:

- Immediately pay 50 percent of the total amount of the bills incurred while on BCEA, *and*

- Pay the rest of the amount owing over the next 12 months according to Pay As You Go Billing (see above).

If a BCEA recipient cannot immediately pay 50 percent of the bill incurred while on BCEA, BC Hydro must give the customer three full working days to contact the Ministry before disconnecting electricity.

BC Hydro will not disconnect a person on BCEA for failing to pay a bill that was due *before* the person started receiving benefits. This must be confirmed with the financial assistance worker. A person in that situation has two options:

1. Defer making payment arrangements until a later date, or
2. Pay the amount in installments added to the Equal Payment Plan (see above).

### **Reducing electricity costs**

#### **How can I reduce my bill?**

You can reduce the amount of electricity you consume in many ways. Consider these examples:

- set your thermostat lower when you are away or asleep
- only run your dishwasher or laundry machines with full loads
- use fluorescent light bulbs
- make home improvements such as repairing leaky faucets or purchasing energy efficient appliances

For more ideas, contact BC Hydro's PowerSmart program by telephone (604 431-9463 in the Lower Mainland or 1 877 431-9463 outside Lower Mainland) or online at <http://www.bchydro.com/powersmart>.

#### **What if I think my meter is not working properly?**

If you doubt the accuracy of the meter that measures the electricity you are using, you may have the meter tested by the Federal Government Inspector. To apply for a meter test, you must write directly to any District Inspector, Electricity and Gas Inspection Services or request a meter test form from a BC Hydro Customer Service Representative. There will be a fee for this service if the meter is tested and is registering correctly. However, if the Inspector finds that the meter is inaccurate, BC Hydro will pay the fee. [B-30 to B-31] To find out how to contact the Inspector, call Enquiry BC at 1-800-663-7867.

#### **What if BC Hydro bills me for the wrong amount?**

If there is a major difference in the amount of electricity you consume and the amount BC Hydro bills you for (for example, if your meter is faulty), BC Hydro can adjust the amount you owe to a maximum of six months. This is called "back billing." [B-25] If you have been over-billed, BC Hydro must refund all money that was incorrectly collected. [B-25-2] If you have been under-billed, BC Hydro will offer you reasonable terms of

payment. [B-25-2] However, if there are reasonable grounds to believe you have tampered with your electricity service or used it in an unauthorized way, you will be responsible for further costs. [B-25-1]

## **Complaints about BC Hydro**

### **How can I make a complaint about BC Hydro?**

It is important that you (or an advocate or support person) *begin* by contacting BC Hydro about your complaint.

#### **Steps:**

1. Call BC Hydro at 1-800-224-9367 and describe your concerns to the customer service representative.
2. If you are not satisfied with the customer service representative's response to your concerns, then ask to speak to a Supervisor.
3. If you are not satisfied with the Supervisor's response, then ask to speak to a manager. If a manager is not available at that time, BC Hydro's policy is to return your call within 24 hours. If your concern is disconnection of your service, BC Hydro's policy is that a manager will call you back, usually within one hour.

It is important that you communicate your concerns and complaints to BC Hydro employees. When BC Hydro receives customer feedback, it is receiving a signal that it needs to improve its customer service.

### **What if I am not satisfied with how BC Hydro treats my complaint?**

If you are not satisfied with BC Hydro's response to your complaint, you can contact the **BC Utilities Commission**. You can find more information about the Commission on their website: <http://www.bcuc.com>, or by calling 1-800-663-1385.

If your problem is not urgent, send a written complaint. The Commission will forward the complaint to BC Hydro and ask them to respond.

Ideally, your written complaint should contain the following information:

1. name of the complainant;
2. complainant's address;
3. utility account number;
4. the key elements of the dispute;
5. names of utility staff/officials contacted;
6. dates contacts were made; and
7. reasons, from the customer's viewpoint, why the problem was not resolved.

Send your complaint to the Commission at:

BC Utilities Commission  
Box 250, 900 Howe Street, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Vancouver, BC V6Z 2N3

If you need immediate help (for example, if you think your electricity is likely to be disconnected), then phone the Commission.

Toll Free: 1-800-663-1385

If you believe that BC Hydro has treated you unfairly, you can also complain to the **BC Ombudsman**. The Ombudsman cannot require BC Hydro to take any particular action, but the Ombudsman can investigate your complaint and make recommendations about how BC Hydro can improve its practices. For more information, see the Ombudsman's website: <http://www.ombud.gov.bc.ca>, or call 1-800-567-3247.