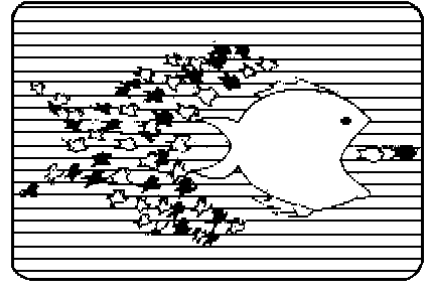


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**ADVOCACY FACT SHEET:  
DEALING WITH TERASEN GAS INC. (FORMERLY BC GAS)**

This fact sheet describes your rights and responsibilities, to help you to advocate for yourself and for others.  
We have reviewed the sheet with Terasen to ensure that it is accurate.

**Terasen's contact numbers**

**General inquiries: 1-888-224-2710**  
**Credit & Collections: 1-888-224-2760**  
**Gas emergency: 1-800-663-9911**

**Setting up your gas service**

**Do I have to set up my own gas service?** Yes, unless you are renting. If you rent, your landlord might deal with Terasen on your behalf. Talk to your landlord to find out whether or not you need to deal with Terasen yourself.

**Who do I call?** Call Terasen at **1-888-224-2710**.

**What do I need to do?** Before Terasen sets up your gas (or re-activates or transfers an existing account), you may be required to provide:

- References and ID; and
- A security deposit (see "security deposits," below).

**Security deposits**

**What is a security deposit?** If a customer or applicant cannot establish or maintain credit to Terasen's satisfaction, the customer or applicant may be required to make a security deposit.

**When would I have to pay a security deposit?** Terasen commonly asks for security deposits from:

- Customers who have poor credit history with Terasen (for example, those who have had their gas service disconnected in the past); and
- Customers who have no credit history with Terasen, and who either:
  - a) refuse to consent to a credit check during the sign-up process; or
  - b) fail a credit check during the sign-up process.

If your gas service has been disconnected for non-payment, Terasen might use your security deposit to pay your unpaid bills. If this happens, Terasen will require you to provide another security deposit when you re-apply for gas service.

**How much will the security deposit be?** According to the Terms of Service that govern Terasen Gas Inc., a security deposit may not be:

- a) less than \$50.00, or
- b) more than Terasen's estimate of the total bill for the customer's two highest months of consumption of gas.

Terasen interprets this to mean that a security deposit will be equal to the total bill for the two highest months' consumption at the premises where the gas service is being set up. For example, if the two highest months' consumption at your premises cost \$160.00 and \$165.00, then your security deposit would be \$325.00. Terasen's policy is to waive a security deposit if this amount is less than \$50.

**What if I can't afford the security deposit?** If you don't have enough money to pay all of your security deposit at one time, contact Terasen and ask to arrange a monthly payment plan that will spread the security deposit out over a few months. (See "Special payment arrangements," below.)

**Important point:** If you arrange a payment plan to cover a security deposit, you will be required to keep your current gas charges up to date as well as making the monthly payments you have agreed to make.

**When will I get my security deposit back?** Terasen will return your deposit, plus interest, when the first of the following two things happens:

- You maintain one year of good payment history, or
- You cease being a Terasen customer.

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**Can I improve my credit history?** If you are paying your bills regularly, you are building good credit history with Terasen.

- Make sure that your Terasen account includes your name as well as your spouse's, so that you can both build a credit record with Terasen.
- If you have adult roommates, they can also be added to the account. That way, everyone on the account can establish a good credit history with Terasen.

### **Equal Billing**

**What is Equal Billing?** It's a type of monthly payment plan in which you agree to make monthly payments, each worth 1/12 of the gas that Terasen expects you to use in a year.

At the 'reconciliation month', Terasen compares your actual gas use to the amount that Terasen expected you to consume in the previous 12 months. Terasen then makes up the difference by giving you a credit if you used less gas than expected, or by billing you if you used more gas than expected.

**What are the benefits of Equal Billing?** Equal Billing means that your gas bills are a predictable fixed cost, rather than rising each winter and falling each summer. This makes it easier to budget.

**Can anyone arrange for Equal Billing?** Terasen will be more willing to agree to Equal Billing for customers with a good credit history. However, it is always worth asking.

**How do I arrange for Equal Billing?** Call Terasen at **1-888-224-2710**. Ask to set up an Equal Billing payment plan.

**What if I'm on Equal Billing and I'm using less than Terasen's estimate?** Terasen conducts quarterly reviews to monitor consumption, and it may adjust your monthly payment amounts to reflect any changes. Be aware that a review may lead Terasen to lower or raise your monthly payments.

### **Special payment arrangements**

**What is a special payment arrangement?** It's an agreement in which you promise to pay Terasen a certain amount each month. Special payment arrangements can be useful if you are behind in your bills, or if you cannot pay your entire security deposit at once.

**How do I arrange for a special payment arrangement?** When you have decided how much you can afford to pay each month, call Terasen at **1-888-224-2760**. Explain that you want to pay your bill or security deposit but cannot afford to do it right now. Outline your plan for paying your bill over time.

### **Important Points:**

- A special payment arrangement is a verbal contract between you and Terasen.
- The payment arrangement must include a plan to pay off your outstanding bill, and an agreement to keep your new gas charges up to date.
- If you default on your special payment arrangement, a disconnection may happen very quickly.
- If you are in a special payment arrangement and if you think that you may default on your payment because of unforeseen circumstances, call Terasen immediately.

### **Problems with paying bills**

**What if I can't pay my bill?** Maintain regular contact with Terasen if you are having trouble paying your bill. If you have received a written disconnection notice and if you fail to pay your gas bill by the deadline stated in the notice, then Terasen will disconnect your gas unless they hear from you.

### **Follow these tips:**

- If you can, make larger payments during the summer while you're using less gas.
- Prepare a monthly payment plan that you can live with and call Terasen to tell them about your plan (see "Special payment arrangements," below).
- Consider going on Equal Billing (see "Equal Billing" above).
- Make home improvements to reduce your heating bills. You can get conservation ideas by calling 1-888-224-2710 for Terasen's "Hot Tips Energy Conservation Booklet" or from the Terasen website at <http://www.terasen.com/Gas/default.htm>.
- If you are on income assistance, you may be eligible for a crisis supplement from the Ministry of Human Resources. You are more likely to receive assistance from the Ministry if you have already contacted Terasen to try to sort out your gas bill.

### **Late payments and other charges**

**Does Terasen charge for late payments?** Terasen charges interest on late payments, starting when a gas bill becomes overdue (i.e. 22 days after the invoice date) and continuing until the overdue amount is paid.

**How much are the late payment charges?** Terasen charges interest on unpaid gas accounts at the rate of 1.5% per month. This works out to 19.56% per year.

**What if my cheque bounces?** Terasen charges \$20.00 for each dishonoured (NSF) cheque.

## **Gas service cut-off**

**When will Terasen cut off my gas service?** Terasen may cut off a customer's gas with at least 48 hours written notice (more notice may be given), or may refuse to set up a new gas account, in the following situations:

- The customer's gas bill is not fully paid by the due date indicated on his/her bill.
- The customer's security deposit is not paid by the due date.
- The customer's gas bill from another place is not paid by the due date.
- Another person in the customer's home has not paid a bill from another place in which the customer and the other person previously lived.
- The customer has failed to apply for service.
- The customer is in receivership or bankruptcy, and has failed to pay any outstanding bills.

**Important Point:** A 'Notice of Disconnection' is mailed separately from your bill. It repeats the information on your previous gas bill and tells you when your Gas service will be disconnected. Terasen only sends one notice of disconnection, so do not ignore it!

Terasen may cut off a customer's gas service without notice, or may refuse to set up a new gas account, in the following situations:

- The customer has not provided Terasen with acceptable references and identification.
- The customer has not applied for service, and thus the home appears to be vacant (as a new tenant or owner, you must apply for a new gas service).
- The customer has not told the truth to Terasen about how he/she uses their gas.
- The customer has moved out of his/her home.
- There is a defective pipe, appliance, or gas fitting in the customer's home.

**Are there additional costs if I am disconnected?** Yes. If your gas has been disconnected for non-payment, you will be charged a reactivation fee before Terasen will reconnect your gas.

**How much are the reactivation fees?** Reactivation fees are based on the costs that Terasen incurs to send a technician to de-activate and later re-activate the service. The current reactivation fees are \$55.00 during working hours and \$95.00 after hours.

## **Complaints about Terasen**

**How can I make a complaint about Terasen?** It is important that you (or an advocate or support person) begin by contacting Terasen about your complaint.

### **Steps:**

1. Call Terasen at **1-888-224-2710** 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 one of the Senior Managers on site.

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

**What do I do if I am not satisfied with how Terasen treats my complaint?** If you are unsatisfied with Terasen's response, you can contact the BC Utilities Commission.

## **Complaints to the BC Utilities Commission**

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

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

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

Toll Free: 1-800-663-1385

The BC Public Interest Advocacy Centre is a non-profit society that advances the interests of groups that are unrepresented or under-represented on issues of major public concern. This fact sheet was prepared in April, 2004.