



## ADVOCACY FACTSHEET: DEALING WITH FortisBC Energy (Gas) Inc.

This fact sheet describes your rights and responsibilities as a FortisBC customer and is designed to help you advocate for yourself and others. We have reviewed the sheet with FortisBC Energy Inc. to ensure that it is accurate.

### TOPICS COVERED IN THIS FACTSHEET

- FortisBC Contact Information
- Setting up or stopping your gas service
- Security deposits
- Equal Payment Plan
- Payment arrangements
- Payment options
- Problems with paying bills
- Late payments and other charges
- Reasons a FortisBC representative may knock on your door
- Natural gas marketers
- Complaints about FortisBC

### FORTISBC CONTACT INFORMATION

**Billing and Inquiries:** 1-888-224-2710

**Gas Emergency:** 1-800-663-9911  
Toll-free, all areas

**Hours**

Monday-Friday

**(Pacific Time)**

7:00 am to 8:00 pm

### SETTING UP OR STOPPING 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 FortisBC on your behalf. Talk to your landlord to find out whether or not you need to deal with FortisBC yourself.

**Who do I call?** Call FortisBC to open or close an account at **1-888-224-2710**. Please note that there is a \$25 application fee to cover administrative costs when opening a new account.

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

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

**What if I am moving?** Avoid being charged for gas usage after you've moved by contacting FortisBC well in advance, and no later than two working days beforehand, to notify FortisBC that you want to stop service.

## **SECURITY DEPOSITS**

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

- Customers who have poor credit history with FortisBC (for example, those who have had their gas service disconnected in the past); and
- Customers who have no credit history with FortisBC, 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 you fail to pay your gas bill, FortisBC might use your security deposit to pay your unpaid bill. If this happens, FortisBC may require you to replenish your security deposit in order to maintain gas service.

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

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

FortisBC interprets this to mean that a security deposit will be equal to the total bill for the two highest consecutive months' consumption at the premises where the gas service is being set up, regardless of whether you or someone else previously occupied the premises. 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. FortisBC'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 FortisBC and ask to arrange a monthly payment plan that will spread the security deposit out over a few months. (See "Payment arrangements," below.)

**IMPORTANT:** 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 security deposit payments you have agreed to make.

**When will I get my security deposit back?** FortisBC 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 FortisBC customer.

You may want to add your spouse or adult roommates to your FortisBC account, so that they can also build a credit record with FortisBC. However, note that anyone whose name is on your FortisBC account will be able to make changes to the account by calling FortisBC.

## **EQUAL PAYMENT PLAN**

**What is an Equal Payment Plan?** An Equal Payment Plan is a payment plan in which you agree to

make 12 monthly payments each worth 1/12 of the gas FortisBC expects you to use in a year. This helps to equalize the cost of your gas bill between high and low use gas months (i.e., winter and summer) making it easier to budget.

**What is the annual reconciliation?** At the end of each year, FortisBC compares your actual gas use during the year to the amount that FortisBC expected you to consume during that period. FortisBC 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.

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

**How do I arrange for Equal Payment Plan?** Call FortisBC at **1-888-224-2710**. Ask to set up an Equal Payment Plan.

**What if I'm on Equal Payment Plan and I'm using less than FortisBC's estimate?** FortisBC 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 FortisBC to lower or raise your monthly payments.

## PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS

**What is a payment arrangement?** It is an agreement in which you promise to pay FortisBC a certain amount each month. 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 payment arrangement?** When you have decided how much you can afford to pay each month, call FortisBC at **1-888-224-2710**. 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.

## PAYMENT OPTIONS

**How can I pay my bill?** There are six ways to pay your bill:

- [Pre-Authorized payment plan](#): Money is automatically withdrawn from your bank account.
- Cheque: Be sure to include your FortisBC account number on the front of your cheque. Mail your payment to:  
FortisBC - Natural Gas  
PO Box 6666 Station Terminal  
Vancouver, BC V6B 6M9
- You may also drop your cheque payment off at any [FortisBC drop-box location](#).
- Telephone or Internet banking through your financial institution: Important! Be sure to input

### **IMPORTANT:**

- A payment arrangement is a verbal contract between you and FortisBC.
- The payment arrangement may 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 payment arrangement, a disconnection may happen very quickly.
- If you are in a payment arrangement and if you think that you may default on your payment because of unforeseen circumstances, call FortisBC immediately.

your FortisBC account number when prompted.

- In person at your financial institution.
- MasterCard: You can pay your bill with your MasterCard through a third-party credit card payment service called KUBRA, which charges a fee based on the amount of your payment. Credit card payments may be completed online or by phone. To make a payment, contact Kubra at 1-855-650-1562 (toll-free) or visit <https://secure6.idoxs.net/FortisBC/OneTimeValidate.aspx>.

## **PROBLEMS WITH PAYING BILLS**

**What if I can't pay my bill?** Maintain regular contact with FortisBC if you are having trouble paying your bill. If you have received a written disconnection notice and you fail to pay your gas bill by the deadline stated in the notice, FortisBC 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.
- Consider going on Equal Payment Plan (see "Equal Payment Plan" above).
- Make home improvements to reduce your heating bills. You can get conservation ideas from FortisBC's "[Hot Tips Energy Conservation Booklet](#)".
- If you are on income assistance, you may be eligible for a crisis supplement from the Ministry of Social Development. You are more likely to receive assistance from the Ministry if you have already contacted FortisBC to try to sort out your gas bill.

## **LATE PAYMENTS AND OTHER CHARGES**

**Does FortisBC charge for late payments?** FortisBC 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?** FortisBC 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?** FortisBC charges \$20.00 for each dishonored (NSF) cheque.

**When will FortisBC cut off my gas service?** FortisBC 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 their bill.
- The customer's security deposit is not paid by the due date.
- The customer's gas bill from another residence is not paid by the due date.

**IMPORTANT:** 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. FortisBC only sends one notice of disconnection, so do not ignore it!

- The previous resident discontinued service to the premises and the new resident has failed to apply for service.

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

- The customer has not provided FortisBC 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 FortisBC about how they use their gas.
- The customer has moved out of their 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 reconnection fee before FortisBC will reconnect your gas.

**How much are the reconnection fees?** Reconnection fees are based on the costs that FortisBC incurs to send a technician to disconnect and later reconnect the service.

<b><u>Reconnection fees effective January 1, 2015</u></b>	<b><u>Fee</u></b>
Reconnection during regular working hours	\$90/hour + GST
Reconnection after regular working hours	\$115/hour + GST

## **REASONS A FORTISBC REPRESENTATIVE MAY KNOCK ON YOUR DOOR**

Occasionally, FortisBC may visit your home, usually by appointment but not always. Reasons for these visits may include:

- relighting appliances after a natural gas outage
- conducting a meter exchange
- conducting a leak survey or corrosion test

FortisBC does not solicit customers – either door-to-door or over the phone – for program promotions. If a gas sales person comes to your door, that person is an independent natural gas marketer operating under the “Customer Choice” program.

## **THE CUSTOMER CHOICE PROGRAM**

FortisBC purchases gas from third party gas producers and delivers that gas to its customers. FortisBC makes a profit on the delivery of gas, but not on the gas itself. Instead, the price FortisBC customers pay for gas is the same price FortisBC has paid to the gas producer. Because of this, the price customers pay for gas goes up and down depending on supply and demand in the North American gas market.

Natural gas marketers, by contrast, are not required to sell gas at the same price they pay for it. This allows them to enter into fixed price contracts with customers for terms of one to five years. The gas

is still distributed by FortisBC, but the customer pays the contract price for the gas, not the price that was paid to the gas producer. This is known as the “Customer Choice Program”.

While the BC Utilities Commission oversees gas marketers' business activities, it does not set the prices gas marketers offer. At any given time, the prices offered by gas marketers may be higher or lower than those being charged by FortisBC.

As a customer, you are free to decide if a fixed rate is right for you and, if so, which offering from which gas marketer best meets your needs. All gas marketers participating in Customer Choice in BC must:

- be qualified, approved and licensed by the BCUC
- adhere to the BCUC's Rules and Code of Conduct for Gas Marketers

For more information on the Customer Choice Program, including a list of gas marketers licenced in BC, questions to ask if a gas marketer comes to your door, and how to make a complaint against a gas marketer, visit the [FortisBC website](#). For information on engaging the BC Utilities Commission dispute resolution process, visit the [Commission website](#).

If you have a concern or complaint regarding gas marketers, call FortisBC at **1-888-224-2710** to log your complaint and have your situation assessed. FortisBC will record the details of the dispute and the BCUC will investigate and resolve the dispute.

## **COMPLAINTS ABOUT FORTISBC**

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

### **Steps:**

1. Call FortisBC 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 FortisBC employees. When FortisBC receives customer feedback, it is receiving a signal that it needs to improve its customer service.

If you are unsatisfied with FortisBC's response, you can contact the BC Utilities Commission.

If your problem is not urgent, send a written complaint. The Commission will forward the complaint to FortisBC 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.

**Greater Vancouver: 604-660-4700**  
**Other areas, toll-free: 1-800-663-1385**