

## The PUCO Guide to Establishing Utility Services

Moving into a new home or apartment can be an exciting but hectic time. One aspect of moving that can be overwhelming for some is establishing utility services including electric, natural gas, telephone, and water service. How long will it take to install service? What options are available? Who do you call if you have a complaint?

The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) is here to help assure you get adequate, safe, and reliable utility services at fair prices. If you would like more information or assistance, call the PUCO call center at (800) 686-PUCO (7826) or visit our Web site at [www.PUCO.ohio.gov](http://www.PUCO.ohio.gov).

### Establishing Service – Plan Ahead

Before you move into your new residence, call your local utility companies to set up an appointment to establish your service. Each utility including electric, natural gas, telephone, and water may have different inspection and installation procedures that need to be completed before your service can begin. Since it may take several days to schedule an installation appointment and for any construction to be completed, it is recommended that you call in advance to ensure that your residence will be equipped with utility service when you are ready for the service to begin.

- **Electric** – If there is already a meter present, contact the company one week prior to needing service. If there is not an existing electric meter, call at least one month in advance. In this case, the company will need to install a meter and perform the necessary inspections before establishing your electric service.
- **Natural Gas** – Contact the company at least one week before you want your service to commence.
- **Telephone** – Contact your local telephone company one month to two weeks in advance to allow for any technical service that may be needed before your telephone service can start.
- **Water** – Your water service may be supplied by a municipality, county, water/sewer district, cooperative, or for-profit company. The PUCO regulates only private, for-profit water companies. Each may have different requirements for establishing service, so be sure to call in advance to ensure that your water service will be established when you are ready to move to your new residence.

Most utility companies allow customers to sign up for service by phone or online. Keep in mind that you may need to provide the company with information such as your name, driver's license number, service address, mailing address, phone number, Social Security Number, and employment information.

When you move, remember to call your existing utility companies to terminate service at your present address. Many times, electric and natural gas companies will use an estimate based on your previous usage to determine the final bill. To ensure an accurate final bill, you can request the company do a final meter reading. Another option is to read the meter yourself and call in the reading to the utility

company. You can contact your utility company or access their Web site for more information about how to read your meter.

### **Installing Service**

The PUCO has established time frames in which utility companies are required to install your service.

- **Electric** – Companies must install service within three days, or 10 days if construction is needed for installation, of the date you specify. If the electric company is unable to meet these deadlines, they must notify you about the delay.
- **Telephone** – Companies must install your service within five days of the date you specify.

Generally, utility companies must provide you with a commitment of when they will have your service installed when you sign up to establish service.

### **Establishing Credit**

When you sign up for utility service with a new company, you will be required to establish credit, which can be done in several ways. If you own your property, have a good credit rating, or have had a similar type of utility service in the past 24 months, you will automatically qualify for credit with the company. If you do not meet one of these criteria, you will be able to establish credit by paying a security deposit or furnishing a creditworthy guarantor.

If you pay a security deposit, you may be allowed to budget the deposit amount over several months. After 12 months, the company should review your credit history to determine if you are eligible for a refund of your deposit. Check with your utility company about the options for establishing credit.

### **Choice Programs**

Choice programs are available for customers of several electric and natural gas utilities in Ohio. These customers are able to choose their electric or natural gas supplier, while distribution continues to be provided by the local utility. You may want to refer to the PUCO *Apples to Apples* comparison charts to see if electric or natural gas choice is available in your area. However, you will still need to establish service with your local utility before you can choose an alternative supplier.

Ohio consumers also have the option of choosing their local telephone company. You may want to consider factors such as the local calling area, monthly rates, and additional services when choosing your local telephone provider. The PUCO can provide you with a listing of local telephone companies as well as tips for selecting a company to help with your decision process.

To obtain the PUCO *Apples to Apples* charts for electric and natural gas suppliers, or to receive information on choosing a local telephone company, you can call the PUCO at (800) 686-PUCO (7826) or visit the Web site at [www.PUCO.ohio.gov](http://www.PUCO.ohio.gov).

## **Consumer Complaints**

Your utility companies should be able to establish your service in a timely manner. If the company does not meet its service commitments, you may be eligible for a full refund or partial reduction of the installation fees. You should first call your utility company to file a complaint, and work with a company representative to resolve the issue. If you are unsatisfied with the way your complaint was handled, you can contact the PUCO to file an informal or formal complaint against the company.

If you have problems with service such as a power outage, gas leak, or water leak, contact your local utility company. You can contact the PUCO if the problem is not resolved to your satisfaction.

## **Utility Assistance Programs**

A number of low-income assistance programs are available to help qualifying Ohioans pay for monthly electric, natural gas, and telephone bills. For more information on program options, benefits, and eligibility requirements, please contact the PUCO or your local utility.

**If you would like to know more about the PUCO or have utility-related questions or concerns,**

**contact the PUCO at:**

**(800) 686-PUCO (7826)**

**(800) 686-1570 (TDD/TTY)**

**In Columbus only:**

**(614) 466-3292**

**(614) 466-8180 (TDD/TTY)**

**[www.PUCO.ohio.gov](http://www.PUCO.ohio.gov)**