



**City Council of the City of Orting, Washington**

**Policy No. 2018-02**

**Utility Billing Policy**

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## Rates & Fees

City fees are established by the City Council and published on the City of Orting's *Fee Schedule*.

Governing Laws:

- OMC 9-1D-3

## Senior/Disabled Utility Rates

It is the policy of the City of Orting to provide the opportunity for customers to apply for senior or disabled utility rates on owner occupied property.

The city will recognize a customer's provided proof of the senior/disable rate through the Pierce County Assessor Treasurers Office for the land taxes of their property. Once the customer is no longer living on the property, the senior/disabled rate will discontinue, following the same guidelines from the Pierce County Assessor Treasurers Office.

The Senior/Disabled rate is set by the council when annual utility rates are adopted.

Governing Laws:

- OMC 9-1D-3

## Snow Bird Utility Rates

It is the policy of the City of Orting to offer a Snow Bird rate for customers that reside inside the city limits, who relocate during the winter months. Customers requesting the Snow Bird rate will have their water meters locked off for the duration of their absence from the property and will have a discounted sewer rate for that period, but will continue to pay the base rates on water and stormwater management.

The Snow Bird sewer rate is set by the council when utility rates are adopted.

Governing Laws:

- OMC 9-1D-3

## Rental Property - Utility Accounts

It is the policy of the City of Orting to allow property owners approve the utility account in the renter's name.

The property owner is ultimately responsible for the billing if the renter vacates the property and does not settle the final billing.

If a property owner fails to pay the utility bill for a tenant, the tenant has the right to assume the billing for the account. A statement will continue to be sent to the owner.

Property owners do not have the right to discontinue services on an account when a tenant remains on the property.

Governing Laws:

- RCW 59.18.300
- RCW 35.21.217

### Billing Dates and Due Dates

The City of Orting mails out utility bills on approximately the first business day of the month.

Utility bills are due by 8 am on the 26<sup>th</sup> of the month, or the next business day if the 26<sup>th</sup> falls on a weekend or holiday. Customers who do not pay their by this date and time are assessed a penalty as set by resolution.

Utility service will be discontinued starting at 8 am on the fifteenth calendar day following the bill due date and assessed an administrative fee as set by resolution.

Governing Laws:

- OMC 9-1D-1

### Unlocking Water Meter for Property Inspections and Water Turn-off for Leaks

It is the policy of the City of Orting to unlock water meters at the request of the customer and/or real estate personnel if the property is for sale. The water meter will be unlocked only for the day of the inspection. If the inspection is on a weekend, the Utility Billing Department will approve or disapprove the request based on Public Works availability. Upon the second request for the same property a fee may be charged. That fee is established by the City Council and published on the City of Orting's *Fee Schedule*.

It is also a policy of the City of Orting to provide emergency shut-off of water in the case of a water leak. If the request is made after regular business hours, a fee may be charged. Upon the second request for the same property a fee may be charged.

### Utility Payment Arrangement Requests

It is the policy of the City of Orting to allow utility customers to make payment arrangements for payments, given the following:

- Arrangements may be made two (2) business days prior to the 25<sup>th</sup> of each month. Although the due date/time is the 26<sup>th</sup> of each month at 8:00am, the city does not open its doors for business until 9:00am, payment is already late at that time.

- Arrangements may also be made two (2) business days prior to the shutoff due date; this date fluctuates month to month based on the 15 additional days allowed to pay when a payment due by the 26<sup>th</sup> of the month has not been met.
- Utility billing staff will review the customer's account prior to approval of the arrangement.
- Accounts that have a history of six (6) late payments within a 12 month period not be granted an arrangement.
- Arrangements are not allowed each month.
- Arrangements are not allowed for both the 26<sup>th</sup> deadline and the shutoff deadline for the same billing period.
- Arrangements are limited to three (3) in any 12 month period.
- If the arrangement is not met, the penalty will be charged to the account.
- If the arrangement is made prior to the shutoff and if the arrangement is not met, the shut-off penalty will be charged to the account and the water meter will be locked off within 24 hours after the previously agreed due date without further notice.
- Appeals for denial of an arrangement may be made in writing to the City Treasurer.

### Utility Service Interruption and Removal/Cut Meter Fee

It is the policy of the City of Orting to lock off water meters when a utility account has been unpaid by the second due date (8am, 15 days after the 26<sup>th</sup> of each month) of the billing period.

The city mails a late notice on or about the 27<sup>th</sup> of each month, notifying a customer of their pending water termination for nonpayment of their utility bill. Paperless customers will receive the delinquency notice through the mail as well. That delinquency notice shall provide the amount currently past due, the specific due date of 8am on the 15<sup>th</sup> day after the 26<sup>th</sup> of the month, and when their water service will be interrupted. Lock-off of the meter will occur normally within two (2) days of this second due date however, per WAC 480-100-128(G)(C), the city does have up to ten (10) days to lock-off the water service. Customers who pay after the shutoff due date, but before the service is terminated, will still be charged a penalty, as if their water was were shut off.

Water meters for unpaid accounts will be locked off by Public Works (PW) staff. The PW staff will leave a yellow notice on the front door of the house informing the customer that their water service has been interrupted for a past due bill.

Payments must be made by 4:45pm on shut off day to have service re-instated that day. Once payment has been received, The PW staff will remove the lock and reinstate water service.

For payments made after 4:45pm, water service will be re-instated the next morning.

PW staff do not collect payments and do not reinstate service after the normal business hours for PW Staff (8am-4pm).

Any customer that has either moved in or moved out, with notification to Utility billing, during the month of the utility bill being considered for shut-off, will not incur that \$50 penalty, nor have service interrupted.

If a PW staff member finds that upon their return to the property to unlock the meter that the lock has been remove and/or cut, there will be a fee for destruction of city property (the lock). The meter will be re-locked and the Shut off fee will be charged.

Governing Law:

- RCW 35.21.300
- WAC 480-110-355
- OMC 9-1D-2

## Rejected Payment

It is the policy of the City of Orting that any rejected payment from either a financial institute or through Invoice Cloud will incur a service fee. If the rejection is an error made by either the financial institute or Invoice Cloud that service fee may be waived, given the following procedure is followed. If the rejection from Invoice Cloud labels the rejection as “unable to locate”, which represents a customer has made an error in entering personal account numbers, the service fee will not be charged.

Repayment of a rejection must be made in cash or if paying through Invoice Cloud payments made be made with a debit or credit card.

Upon two (2) rejected payments, within a twelve (12) month period, the utility account may become a “Cash Only” account. If there are three (3) rejections for the “unable to locate” through Invoice Cloud, the city may charge the service fee.

If the rejected payments are all through the Invoice Cloud electronic payment option, the utility account, upon approval of the City Treasurer, will be blocked from the Invoice Cloud payment option.

The city may at its discretion refuse payments made by personal or business checks.

Governing Law:

- WAC 480-110-355
- OMC 9-1D-1(D)

## Waiving Penalties and Rejected Payment Fee

It is the policy of the City of Orting to review customer requests to waive penalties and other fees after the customer has submitted a written request. All requests must be approved of the City Treasurer.

The City will waive one late fee per rolling 12 month period.

## Water Leak Adjustments

It is the policy of the City of Orting to offer an adjustment to a customer utility bill after a water leak has been repaired.

The customer will be required to submit a *Utility Adjustment Request* to the Utility Billing Department, with proof of repair.

If the adjustment is approved, the affected water billing will be adjustment based on the average use for the past 12 month. Adjustment request must be within 30 days from the invoice date for the month the customer is seeking an adjustment for.

Adjustments for water leaks are limited to one during an 18 month period.

The request will be forwarded to the City Treasurer for review and approval.

Governing Law:

- OMC 9-1D-4

## Collections & Liens

It is the policy of the City of Orting to forward customer's unpaid billings to an external collection agency or process a lien against the property. Any additional cost to file a lien that is charged will be the responsibility of the customer to pay.

Although the city utility accounts do follow the property, there are times when said accounts may require transfer to a collection agency. In addition there may be an unpaid invoice from another city department that may require the submittal to a collection agency.

Governing Law:

- RCW 4.16.040
- RCW 19.16.500
- RCW 19.16.500

## Closed Utility Account Balances

It is the policy of the City of Orting to refund any credit balances on the customer's utility account. If the credit is \$2.00 or less the refund will not occur, without a request from the customer. If the account is a renter's account the credit will remain on the account.

If a customer's account has a balance due, the final billing will be sent to the customers forwarding address. However, if the balance is \$5.00 or less, the amount due will be waived and not collected from the customer.

If the utility account holder is a renter, and the remaining balance is not paid, it will be the responsibility of the property owner (landlord) to settle the unpaid balance.

If the property has been sold, vacated or foreclosed and the remaining balance has not been paid, it will be the responsibility of the new owner to settle the unpaid balance unless the city is prohibited from collecting by law.