



Public Works
Utility Department

CUSTOMER SERVICE
POLICY

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OVERVIEW

Purpose

The purpose of this Policy and Procedures manual is to establish uniform and non-discriminatory policy standards for the proper administration of the Barrow County Utilities Department. The Department will, always, conduct itself in accordance with the intent of these policies. Barrow County, through the Department, provides Potable Water and Wastewater service on a uniform and non-discriminatory basis. The Department is a subordinate entity of the County, governed by and with policies established by the Barrow County Board of Commissioners.

Validity

The policies and procedures specified herein supersede and replace any prior policies, procedures, regulations, etc., governing provision of utility service unless such prior specification is protected by valid agreement or otherwise protected by law or action of the Barrow County Board of Commissioners. If a portion of this document is declared unconstitutional or void for any reason by any court of competent jurisdiction, such a decision shall in no way affect the validity of the remaining portions of these policies.

Review of Policies and Procedures Manual

The Department shall periodically review this policy to evaluate the adequacy of its provisions. Revisions must be reviewed and approved by the Board of County Commissioners prior to implementation and dissemination, except as may be authorized as a ministerial responsibility.

Ministerial Responsibilities Authorized

The Barrow County Board of Commissioners hereby delegates and authorizes the Department Manager or designee to perform those functions necessary to properly conduct the business of the Department in conformance with the policies, procedures, and regulations set forth in this manual for carrying out the day-to-day activities of the Department.

Customer Focus

The Department is committed to consistently providing superior service to its customers, considering each Customer's needs on an individual basis. Customer concerns will be handled in a professional manner with due consideration being given to the individual circumstances, the Customer's previous billing/payment history, and the cost/benefit of the actions being proposed to resolve the Customer's concern. Nothing in this policy shall be construed to limit the Department Manager's authority to settle Customer billing issues as authorized by the County.

SECTION 1 – CUSTOMER RESPONSIBILITIES

1. The customer whose name appears on the application for service is the customer responsible for payment of all charges. The customer is also responsible for any rules or policy violations that occur regarding the service to that property. Personal participation by the customer in any such violation shall not be necessary to impose personal responsibility on the customer.
2. Valid driver's license or official picture identification is required to apply for service or make any changes to an account.
3. Copy of ownership, closing documents, lease or rental agreement will be required for all new service connections.

SECTION 2 – SERVICE CONNECTIONS

1. All service connections* shall be established by the customer of the premises being served and consuming the water each month.
2. Customers moving into the County or transferring their current Barrow account must do so in person at the Utilities office. When activating a new account, a \$100.00 deposit is required. The deposit is refundable at termination of account, if it has not been applied to an unpaid past due balance. This fee is payable by check, cash, money order, credit card, or debit card. Residents moving within the County may have their deposit transferred to a new account, provided that the existing account has paid in full.
3. For the same day service, applications must be completed before 3:00pm. The Utilities Manager shall decide whether same day service is available after 3:00pm. Service orders for new accounts shall be established within two business days.
4. When new service is established, the Department will not be responsible for any property damage to customer owned water lines.

** Service connection specifically refers to the initiation of water service for properties where a meter and service connection are already in place.*

SECTION 3 – HOURS OF SERVICE

1. Normal Customer Service Business Hours are Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.** excluding County observed holidays.

*** payment windows close at 4pm, but other customer services remain open until 4:30pm.*

SECTION 4 – BILLING

1. Each customer shall be billed twelve times per year, with a billing cycle consisting of approximately 30 days. The cycle may be impacted by weather, holidays, access to meters, work force availability, etc.
2. All meters shall be read and billing performed monthly.
3. Utility bills shall be mailed to customers by the end of each month. If the last day of the month falls on the weekend or holiday, bills will be mailed the following business day.

4. The 20th of each month shall be the official due date. Account charges shall be paid at the Utilities office no later than the 20th of each month to avoid penalties and no later than the end of the month to avoid service disconnection.
5. Failure to receive a Utility bill shall not prevent such bill from becoming delinquent nor relieve the customer from payment. Failure of water and/or sewer customers to pay account charges duly imposed shall result in the following:
 - a. On the 21st of each month, unpaid account charges shall be subject to a \$2.00 or 10% penalty, whichever is greater.
 - b. Account charges not paid by the end of the month shall be subject to service disconnection.
 - c. Service Disconnection work orders shall be forwarded to Department personnel by 8:00am.
 - d. Service disconnections shall begin the morning of the 1st, or the next business day, at 8:30am.
 - e. After 8:00am on the 1st, a \$25.00 disconnection fee shall be added to each account.
 - f. There shall be no service disconnections made after 2:00 p.m.
 - g. If payment for service disconnection is received by 3:30pm, the Department will reconnect the service the same day.
 - h. If a customer pays bill ONLINE after 4:30 pm, can show proof to Department personnel, and request personnel to restore water service that evening, an additional after hour charge of \$125.00 shall be added to the customer's account.
 - i. It shall be the customers' responsibility to contact the Utilities office during normal Customer Service Business Hours M-F 8:00am to 4:30pm if payment is made after hours and water service has not been restored.
 - j. No arrangements shall be made by Department personnel in the field regarding service disconnection or service reconnection procedures. All customers shall be referred to the Utilities Office.
 - k. If a check is returned Non-sufficient Funds on disconnect date, customer is subject to automatic disconnection without prior notification, and the Department retains the right to ask for payment in full by cash, money order, credit card, or debit card. Customer shall be subject to a \$35.00 fee for the returned check. After receiving three returned checks on an account/or any person, the Department shall no longer accept checks for future payments.
 - l. If payment after disconnection is not received within five business days, a customer's account will be inactivated, and deposit will be applied to outstanding bill. Customer will then be required to re-establish a new account with a new deposit, copy of ownership, closing documents, lease or rental agreement, and driver's license.

SECTION 5 – AFTER HOURS CONNECTIONS

1. If a customer pays bill ONLINE after 4:30 pm, can show proof to Department personnel, and request personnel to restore water service that evening, an additional after hour charge of \$125.00 shall be added to the customer's account. Customers shall be required to sign After- Hours Service Reconnection form before service is restored.
2. All after-hour connections shall be based on the availability of staff.
3. Under no circumstances is any customer or individual other than an authorized Department representative permitted to restore water service to the premises. If tampering occurs, up to a \$500.00

tampering charge shall be assessed, and the matter may be turned over to local law enforcement for theft of service. The entire account balance plus the Tampering Fee shall be paid to restore service.

SECTION 6 – CONTINUITY OF SERVICE

1. The Department will always use reasonable diligence to provide continuous service, and having used reasonable diligence shall not be liable to the Customer for failure or interruption of continuous service.
2. The Department shall not be liable for any act or omission caused directly or indirectly by labor troubles, accidents, litigation, breakdowns, shutdowns, repairs, adjustments, acts of sabotage, wars, Federal, State, Municipal, or other Governmental legislation, regulation, or other interference, acts of God, or other causes beyond its control.

SECTION 7 – ACCOUNT CHARGES

1. All utility accounts are due and payable on the due date as shown on the utility bill. To maintain the service, the monthly charge due must be paid in full; a minimum charge is assessed whether service is used. If the account is not paid by the due date, the account is deemed to be overdue.
2. Charges shall be billed up to the time of disconnection/shutoff with the next regular billing cycle.
3. A utility bill shall be mailed to the Customer every month. The Department must receive payment by the bill due date to ensure proper credit to the account prior to the next bill. Non-payment prior to the beginning of the next billing period shall result in the unpaid amount being carried forward as a past-due balance.
4. Bills will be rendered monthly and shall be considered as received by the Customer when mailed to their service or mailing address, as requested by the Customer. Non-receipt of bills by the Customer does not release nor diminish the obligation of the Customer with respect to payment.

SECTION 8 – OWNERSHIP

1. Barrow County retains all ownership of water meters connected to the County's water system.
2. No applicant named on the utility bill or person associated with the property connected to the water distribution system, sewer collection system, and all appurtenances, shall sell, transfer, or assign water rights to Barrow County's system unless authorized in writing by Barrow County.
3. Only Department Employees or those directly authorized by the Department may work on water meters, water lines, sewer lines, and all appurtenances maintained by the Department, and/or tap into County lines.

SECTION 9 – CONTINUATION OF CHARGES

1. If the customer or property owner does not request a water service disconnection, the Department will continue billing for the service even if the property is determined to be vacant.

2. Customers are responsible for all charges until the Department can disconnect services in accordance with the customer requested disconnection date.

SECTION 10 – ACCOUNT DEPOSIT

1. To activate a new account, an account deposit shall be required on all residential accounts in the amount of \$100.00 per residential unit.
 - a. Master metered multi-family building shall be required to pay a deposit of \$100.00 per dwelling unit.
 - b. Deposits are refundable upon termination of service; after all outstanding charges have been paid.
2. To activate a new account, an account deposit shall be required on all non-residential accounts as follows:
 - a. Restaurant and manufacturing – \$500.00
 - b. Retail/office commercial – \$300.00.
 - c. Commercial/Industrial with more than 50,000 s.q.f.t. shall be determined based on an estimated two months of water consumption.

SECTION 11 – CHANGES TO METER SIZES

1. Account meter size can be reduced at no charge to the customer, if the property owner submits a request in writing to the Department.
2. All requests for meter size increases shall be considered a new connection.
3. All associated fees shall be paid before the new connection is completed.

SECTION 12 – RELOCATION OF A METER

1. If the relocation of a current meter is requested, the customer shall be billed according to the current Water Fee Schedule.
2. All associated costs shall be paid prior to the start of the meter relocation.
3. All meter relocations must meet applicable Department guidelines.
4. A meter can only be relocated within the same parcel as the original meter location.

SECTION 13 – RETURNED CHECKS AND DELINQUENT ACCOUNTS

1. All checks returned by the bank as unpaid/non-sufficient funds shall carry a \$35 returned check fee.
2. After a check is returned for non-sufficient funds, the balance of the account, plus the \$35 returned check fee must be paid in cash, credit card, or money order. Failure to pay the total amount due within three business days, after being notified by the Department, shall result in services being disconnected.
3. A check shall be accepted for the following month's service unless there is a history of non-sufficient funds as provided in "Section 4 – Billing" item 5.k

SECTION 14 – WITHHOLDING SERVICE

1. Except as may otherwise be provided by law, the Department may withhold or discontinue service until all past-due amounts, delinquent fees, reactivation fees, tampering and related fees, have been paid in full.
2. In the event the Department discovers private facilities adversely affecting Department facilities, service may be withheld until such a situation is corrected. In general, and unless otherwise stated herein, 10 days' notification of proposed termination will be provided to allow the Customer to respond to and correct such deficiency, unless immediate action is justified in the interest of public health, safety or welfare.

SECTION 15 – CUSTOMER REQUESTED DISCONNECTION

1. A water service disconnection shall be completed, at the request of the person whose name is indicated on the account (proper identification is required). All requests shall be submitted in writing.
2. There shall be no fee for the disconnection request.
3. After proper documentation is received, all requests shall be completed within two business days.

SECTION 16 – COMPLAINTS AND ADJUSTMENTS

1. If an account charge is believed to be in error, the customer shall present their claim at the Utilities office.
2. Such a claim, if made after the bill has become delinquent, may not be effective in preventing service disconnection.
3. Paying such bill under the protest does not waive the customer's right to dispute.
4. **NOTE:** It is not the intent of the Department to inconvenience any customer in any way. As with all utility services, unavoidable circumstances may cause service to be temporarily disconnected. We will work in every way to get the service restored as soon as possible.

SECTION 17 – DISCONNECTION FOR NON-PAYMENT

1. The 20th of each month shall be the official due date. Account charges shall be paid at the Utilities office no later than the 20th of each month to avoid penalties and no later than the 30th to avoid service disconnection.
2. Failure to receive a Utility bill shall not prevent such a bill from becoming delinquent nor relieve the customer from payment. Failure of water and/or sewer customers to pay account charges duly imposed shall result in the following:
 - a. On the 21st of each month, unpaid account charges shall be subject to a \$2.00 or 10% penalty, whichever is greater.
 - b. Account charges not paid by the 30th shall be subject to service disconnection.
 - c. Service Disconnection work orders shall be forwarded to Department personnel by 8:00am.

- d. Service disconnections should begin on the morning of the 1st, or the next business day, at 8:30am.
- e. After 8:00am on the 1st, a \$25.00 disconnection fee shall be added to each account.
- f. There shall be no service disconnections made after 2:00 p.m.
- g. If payment for service disconnection is received by 3:30pm, the Department will reconnect the service same day.
- h. If a customer pays bill ONLINE after 4:30 pm and can show proof to Department personnel, and request personnel to restore water service that evening, an additional after-hour charge of \$125.00 shall be added to the customer's account.
- i. It shall be the customer's responsibility to contact the Utilities office during normal business hours M-F 8:00am to 4:30pm if payment is made after hours and the water service has not been restored.
- j. No arrangements shall be made by Department personnel in the field regarding service disconnection or service reconnection procedures. All customers shall be referred to the Utilities Office.
- k. If a check is returned Non-Sufficient Funds on disconnect date, customer is subject to automatic disconnection without prior notification, and the Department retains the right to ask for payment in full by cash, money order, credit or debit card. Customer shall be subject to a \$35.00 fee for the returned check. After receiving three returned checks on an account/or any person, the Department shall no longer accept checks for future payments.
- l. If payment after disconnection is not received within five business days, the customer's account will be inactivated, and deposit will be applied to the outstanding bill. Customers will then be required to activate a new account with a new deposit, copy of ownership, closing documents, lease or rental agreement, and driver's license.

SECTION 18 – PENALTIES

- 1. If the billing due date falls on a day that the County is closed, the due date is the next day of business.
- 2. Payments that are not received by 4:30 p.m. on the billing due date are deemed to be overdue.
- 3. A penalty of two dollars or ten percent (10%), whichever is greater, shall apply to all late payments not received by the next day after the due date.

SECTION 19 – SERVICE RECONNECTION AFTER NON-PAYMENT

- 1. The entire account must be paid in full before services are reconnected.
- 2. The County shall have the right to refuse to render service to an applicant or to any member of an applicant's household who is living at the same address whenever such person(s) is (are) delinquent on any payment to the County or had his or her service discontinued because of a violation of this policy.
- 3. If a deposit was applied to the amount owed or never collected, the customer will be required to meet the deposit requirements.

SECTION 20 – PAYMENT PLAN

1. The Department will work with customers on high-water bills (defined as at least twice the normal consumption). An agreement shall be signed, with a payment made up front. The remaining amount will be divided at the discretion of the Utilities manager or designee. This amount must be paid in addition to the regular water bills until the amount is paid in full. Bills greater than \$500 will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.
2. No penalties will be assessed against the account if the payments are made on time and in accordance with the agreement.
3. To be eligible, the following requirements must be met:
 - a. All arrangements will be in writing and approved by the Utilities Manager or designee.
 - b. Payment arrangements must be made prior to disconnection for non-payment.

Alternative Payment Arrangements

Upon receipt of a water disconnection notice, if a customer is unable to pay his or her bill, he or she must contact Barrow County Utilities office to make payment arrangements. Depending on each customer's case, a customer may be offered a deferred payment (paying later), reduced payment (spreading payments over an agreed upon period not to exceed 12 months), or some other alternative payment schedule. Water service will not be discontinued for non-payment if the customer complies with the alternative payment plan entered into with Barrow County Utilities and the customer keeps current on his or her account for water service charges accrued in each subsequent billing period. If a customer fails to comply with an alternate payment arrangement, Barrow County Utilities will give a discontinuance of water service notice, a minimum of five (5) business days before discontinuing water service.

SECTION 21 – BILL ADJUSTMENTS

1. Under some circumstances involving leaks, and other water losses beyond reasonable control, the Department may provide an adjustment on an account once every twelve (12) months.
2. To qualify for leak adjustment, the water usage must be at least twice the average quarterly usage.
3. The Department shall not be obligated to adjust any bills not contested within thirty (30) days of the bill due date.
4. The County reserves the right to request documentation or evidence of the leak, nature of the leak, and/or documentary evidence that repairs have been performed for any leak. Failure to provide documentation may result in the adjustment being denied.

SECTION 22 – TAMPERING AND THEFT OF SERVICE

1. Under no circumstances is any customer or individual authorized to turn water back on or alter services. Only authorized County staff or contracted employees may connect services or work on County lines.

2. All people are prohibited from interfering with or disturbing in any manner or form, any water meters, radio equipment, switches, locks, cutoffs, other appliances of the County, including fire hydrants, or to appropriate or use any water after service has been cut off or discontinued for non-payment or to avoid payment.
3. The property owner, legal tenant, or person(s) noted on the utility account shall be held responsible for the violation of this section. A tampering fine of up to five hundred dollars (\$500.00) shall be assessed where a meter or main has been disturbed. A tampering fine of up to seven hundred and fifty dollars (\$750.00) shall be assessed for tampering with a hydrant or any fire meter.
4. The Department reserves the right to prosecute in accordance with established laws after any tampering of services has been discovered.
5. If, after removal of service, an alternative means of obtaining service is attempted (such as a “jumper” or straight piping), then the service to that property will be removed until such time as the case can appear and be settled before the Barrow County Court with applicable jurisdiction.
6. If the Department determines theft of service has occurred, it reserves the right to adjust the customer’s current bill and the bills for the past six (6) months’ usage. If the approximate amount of unmetered service cannot be reasonably determined, the customer’s usage will be billed at two (2) times the average consumption.

SECTION 23 – DAMAGE TO METER AND RADIO EQUIPMENT

1. Customers shall be responsible to ensure that Department equipment is not damaged through the routine maintenance of adjacent property. The owner may be responsible for damages to Department meters and equipment.
2. The County reserves the right to assess the cost of the damaged equipment to the utility account.

SECTION 24 – OBSTRUCTING A METER OR HYDRANT

1. The Department must have access to meters and all other department appurtenance to properly service accounts and to ensure accurate billing. The utility customer is responsible for trimming, cutting back, or removing any bushes, trees, plants, sod, landscaping, etc. that may cover or obstruct access to a meter to three feet from the hydrant and all other department appurtenances.
2. It is a violation to cover or obstruct access to a water meter and any other department appurtenances. Failure to maintain accessibility could result in fines of twenty-five (\$25.00) a day for non-compliance.
3. The Department reserves the right to disconnect services or remove the obstruction if not resolved seven (7) days after notice has been provided and pursue costs incurred to the Department for clearing the obstruction through the appropriate Barrow County Court.
4. If a leak is observed where there is an obstruction, the Department shall take immediate action to remove the obstruction and disconnect the service until necessary repairs are made.

SECTION 25 – SERVICE TO MULTIPLE LOCATIONS

1. If one water meter serves more than one location or living unit (for example: two units/duplex apartments, a rooming house or more than one business in a shopping center, master metered

residential developments), the meter and service connection must be properly sized to prevent any service interruption for any additional unit. Multi- Unit Services accounts must be in the owner's name. In the event there are multiple owners, the County may require all parties to sign the application and require a larger deposit. This policy is intended to avoid having a service request from one tenant that would affect another tenant's service, and to avoid having to allocate costs among tenants who share one meter.

2. Effective upon approval date of this policy. Each new or renovated single residential dwelling will be required to have an individual water meter.

SECTION 26 – SERVICE CALLS ON PRIVATE PROPERTY

1. The Department will not make any repairs to lines, service lateral or appurtenances not directly belonging to the Department or on private property. All lines between the Department meter or service cleanout and place of service (to include all lines within or directly under a structure) shall be considered private lines.

SECTION 27 – SERVICES REQUESTED BY CUSTOMER

1. Once received, the request will be inspected within five (5) business days.

SECTION 28 – ESTIMATED BILLING

1. Billing conditions may arise, which prohibit Department staff from reading a customer's meter either due to a damaged meter or obstruction of a meter. In these cases, the Department will estimate the reading based on historical data or other general comparisons. Once a reading can be made, the Department will make the necessary adjustments for any discrepancies greater than 3,000 gallons for residential services and 5,000 gallons for commercial.

SECTION 29 – WATER AND SEWER RATE SCHEDULE

1. See Utilities Rates at barrowga.org for a complete schedule of Department rates and fees.

Approval given this 28th day of October, 2025

By: 

Pat Graham
Barrow County Chairman