

Village of Hamilton (VOH) Electric and Natural Gas Residential Customer Rights and Responsibilities

This booklet, which we provide once each year, summarizes our service policies, supply choices, and your rights under the Public Service Commission (PSC) rules and the Home Energy Fair Practices Act (HEFPA) (Title 16 of the New York Codes, Rules and Regulations - Part II) based on New York State Public Service Law. Please take time to read and keep for future reference.

How to Contact Us

Electric or Gas Interruptions or Emergency numbers available 24 hours a day:

- Work Day - 315-824-1111 or 315-824-2120 or 844-824-1100.
- After Hours or Holidays - 844-824-1100.

Electric Lines Down or Gas Odor Emergencies:

- Work Day - 315-824-1111 or 315-824-2120 or 844-824-1100.
- After Hours or Holidays - 844-824-1100.

Payment Arrangements:

- Work Day - 315-824-1111.
- You can also visit us online at: <http://hamilton-ny.gov/village-of-hamilton/municipal-utilities> for additional information.

Billing & Payment

We issue a monthly bill based on actual or estimated meter readings that measure the amount of energy you have used. Past energy use is the primary factor we consider when preparing an estimated bill or levelized payment plan.

Whenever we send a bill based on estimated energy use, it is clearly marked in the meter reading table. The procedure we use to estimate your bill is approved by the PSC.

If you prefer, you can provide us with a meter reading on the months we are not reading your meter.

Indoor Meters

If you will not be home on a scheduled meter reading date, please let us know in advance. Contact us by calling 315-824-1111 with special access instructions to

your property, such as letting us know where the key is kept. Our meter reader will use these instructions to gain access to the meter. We will not enter your property without an adult present, unless it is an emergency or you have granted us permission to do so. If you do not control access to the meter at your home, please help us by asking the building owner to let the meter reader in.

For your protection, every VOH employee carries a photo identification card. Always ask to see the card before granting entry to your home. Before entering your home, we knock and announce our presence.

Payment and Billing Service Charges

Billing Payment Options

- Mail your payment to PO Box 119, 3 Broad Street, Hamilton, NY 13346.
- Bring your payment to the office at 3 East Broad Street, Hamilton, NY.
- Leave your payment in our drop box at 3 East Broad Street, Hamilton, NY.
- Return Check fees apply for payment for insufficient funds and for payments with incorrect bank information.

Payment Due Date

Your payment is due on the date indicated on your bill. Late payment charges are 1.5% a month (18% per year). If you pay by mail you can avoid a late payment charge by having payment received by the VOH by the date on your bill. A late payment charge will be assessed if payment is not received within 20 days of the due date.

Deposits

VOH will require a deposit from new customers who are requesting service for less than one year (short term or seasonal) or are asked for proof of identity and fail to provide any. We will require that the deposit be paid in full prior to service being turned on. The deposit is waived for new customers who:

- Are on public assistance;
- Receive Supplemental Security Income or additional state payments; or
- Are 62 years of age or older and have not been shutoff for non-payment in the past six (6) months.

When a deposit is required, we will require a reasonable amount of money not greater than twice the average monthly bill for a calendar year, except in the case of electric or gas space heating customers, where deposits may not exceed twice the estimated average monthly bill for the heating season.

If you are not delinquent in the payment of bills during the one-year period from the payment of the deposit, the deposit shall be refunded to you.

**Payment Agreement: If you are having difficulty paying your VOH bill,
Don't Wait Please Call Us At
315-824-1111.**

Together we can work on a solution, including a possible payment agreement. All of your financial information will be kept confidential.

We will work with you to determine if you are eligible for an alternate payment agreement. In making this agreement, we will require documentation of your financial circumstances. If you can demonstrate financial need for such terms, we must provide for installments as low as \$10 per month and no down payment.

Levelized Payment Plan

This option spreads your energy costs evenly over twelve (12) months. While there is no cost savings, you will know your payment in advance. This plan will be based on your recent 12-month experience, adjusted for known changes. If 12 months of billing data are not available, then 12 months of billing data for the premises will be used. If 12 months of billing data are not available for the premises, then we will estimate future consumption over the next 12-month period.

Your Residential Service

Residential Customer: A Residential Customer is anyone the VOH delivers electricity or natural gas to at a place used primarily as their residence.

PLEASE NOTE: HEFPA requires that New York State utilities provide certain consumer protections and follow specific procedures prior to terminating utility service for customers who fall behind in paying their bills.

Closing Your VOH Account

If you want to have your VOH account turned off because you are moving to another location, contact us by phone and schedule service turnoff in advance. Once we have a final meter reading, our billing system will discontinue your energy supply.

It is important we access our meter for readings, inspections and maintenance.

- If we are unable to read the meter for six (6) months or three (3) billing periods of estimated bills, whichever is greater, we will send you a “No Access” notice or contact you requesting that you either provide us with a reading or arrange access to the meter.
- If we cannot gain access, you might be subject to special charges.
- If the meter has not been read in eight (8) consecutive months or four (4) billing periods, whichever is greater, you or your building owner may be subject to a twenty-five dollar (\$25.00) charge on your next bill, and all subsequent bills until we gain access.

Termination of Service for Nonpayment

The last thing we want to do is terminate your electricity or natural gas service. Before we terminate your VOH service for nonpayment, we make every effort to help you find a way to pay your VOH bill. We will refer you to agencies that may be able to assist you. If you are having difficulty paying your VOH bill, please call us at 315-824-1111.

Before we terminate your service for nonpayment, we will send you a final termination notice. We do not send a final termination notice until a bill is 25 days past due.

We will send you a payment agreement at least ten (10) days prior to the termination date on your final termination notice if you are not presently on a payment agreement. If a payment agreement has not been made with us or you are not up to date on your present payment agreement, we have the right to turn off your electric or natural gas service.

We may terminate service only between 8:00 AM and 4:00 PM Monday through Thursday. We will not terminate service on a day when our offices or the PSC offices are closed, or on the day before a public holiday, on a holiday, or during a two-week period that includes Christmas and New Years Day.

If your service has been terminated and you cannot reach an agreement with our representative to reconnect service, you may ask to speak with a supervisor. If you are still not satisfied, you may call VOH Customer Appeals at 315-824-1111. If an agreement cannot be reached, you may call the PSC Emergency Hotline at 1-800-342-3355, weekdays between 7:30 AM and 7:30 PM.

Special Services

Cold Weather Protections: In effect between November 1st and April 15th

Heat-related service is vital to maintain your comfort and safety during winter months. You have heat-related service if the VOH delivers electricity or natural gas used to heat your home or if the VOH delivers electricity needed to operate your primary heating system. Under any of these circumstances, we will not terminate your electricity or natural gas service between November 1st and April 15th unless we have made a diligent effort to personally contact you or an adult member of your household, and have determined that no serious impairment to health or safety would result if the service is terminated.

Termination of Service in Cold Weather Months: In Effect between November 1st and April 15th

We will try to contact you regarding payment agreements at least seventy-two (72) hours before termination of VOH service. If our efforts to contact you by telephone during the day and evening hours are unsuccessful, we will send a representative to your home. If we are unable to contact you, your service may be terminated. If, after meeting with you, we find that service termination might cause serious harm, we will ask the Department of Social Services (DSS) to look into the matter. We will continue your service until DSS reviews your situation.

If you have any question on preceding protections, please call 315-824-1111.

- **Turn off of service for unsafe conditions.** We may turn off service any time we find a serious safety or technical problem. After the problem is corrected, we will turn service on as soon as possible.
- **Hardship Protections.** When you are faced with a hardship that threatens your health or safety, we may refer you to DSS and to other resources and services. To ensure that you receive all of the protection available to you, return the form found at the end of this document.
- **Medical Emergency.** If you or a member of your household has a serious medical condition and you receive a service termination notice, we will continue your electric and or natural gas service for thirty (30) days when you file a **medical certificate with us from your doctor or local board of health.** To renew the certificate and continue service after the thirty (30) days are up, have your doctor or local board of health provide in writing why the service is still needed. They must submit this on their stationary and **include their medical identification number.** As long as you can document that you are unable to make a payment, we will not terminate your service

during your medical emergency. However, **you are still responsible for payment of your VOH bills.**

- **Critical Customer Care Program.** If you need VOH service to operate life sustaining equipment, it is your responsibility to notify us. We will tag your VOH meter, code your account, and make every effort to contact you during an extended service interruption.
- **Special Identification Program.** If everyone in your household, including yourself, is either blind or disabled, 18 years of age or under, or at least 62 years of age or older, we will attempt to contact you by phone or in person at least seventy-two (72) hours before termination of service to work out a payment agreement. If a payment agreement cannot be reached, we will notify DSS and will continue your electric or natural gas service while DSS reviews your situation. If service has been terminated, we will attempt to contact you again with in ten (10) days to offer a plan to reconnect service.

If you are having difficulty paying your VOH bill, don't wait, contact us at 315-824-1111. Together, we can work on a solution.

To ensure you receive these hardship protections listed above, complete and return the form found at the end of this document or contact us at 315-824-1111. All of the information you provide will be kept confidential.

Reconnection of Service.

We charge to reconnect service during and after normal business hours. The meter reconnection charge is \$15. If your service has been terminated for nonpayment, we will reconnect within twenty-four (24) hours when:

- You have paid the amount due or signed the payment agreement, if eligible, and made a down payment, if you are not now on a payment agreement.
- The PSC directs us to reconnect the service.

Important Information for Tenants and Landlords

If electric and/or gas service is included in rent and a landlord fails to pay, a tenant may be able to maintain service if the tenant can join with other tenants to pay the current bills, which may be deducted from rent. To notify tenants when a landlord fails to pay, we will post notices throughout the building. We will also send notices to each tenant to inform them if service is scheduled for shut-off. If your landlord has not paid his or her utility bill, VOH will post notices throughout the building to inform you. From November 1st to April 15th, we will also send notices to each tenant or dwelling at least thirty (30) days before the service will be terminated. During the rest of the year, we will send notices at least eighteen (18) days before

service will be terminated. The notice will tell you whom to contact to resolve the problem. During that period we will determine whether any tenant has a medical or other problem that would be worsened by discontinuing service.

Shared Meter Conditions

Shared Meter Law is enforced by all New York State utilities under the administration of the New York State Public Service Commission. Residential tenants are required to pay only for the electricity and/or gas used in their dwelling or in any area with equipment that is under their exclusive use and control. If shared metering exists in a building, tenants may be paying for electricity or gas used by others, or they may receive electricity or gas through another tenant's meter (third party). Shared Meter Law states that the tenant billed for the shared condition must be reimbursed by the landlord and/or third party and/or, under certain conditions, the tenant may enter into a mutually acceptable agreement with their landlord. The law also requires VOH, under certain circumstances, to bill the landlord an additional 12 months of estimated service on the shared meter regardless if the situation is corrected or not. If you suspect your electricity or natural gas meter is registering service not used in your dwelling, call us at 315-824-1111, and we will investigate. Shared Meter Law requires VOH to provide written notification of a pending investigation and the resulting determination to all parties involved. Tenants will need to provide the owner/building manager's name, address and telephone number. When shared metering is found, landlords are required to either correct the condition or, under certain conditions, provide a mutually acceptable agreement with their tenant or place the shared meter under their name. Failure by the landlord to cooperate with our request to investigate may still result in our determination of a shared meter condition. If the landlord fails to take any action within 120 days of a shared meter determination, the law requires that VOH establish an account in the landlord's name for all future service measured on the shared meter until compliance with one of the remedies listed above.

NOTE: All of the Special Protections described in this brochure apply to tenants.

Complaint Handling Procedure.

Whether you write or contact us by phone, we will address your questions. If you feel our representative has not adequately addressed your concern, please ask to speak with a supervisor.

If after talking with a supervisor you are still not satisfied, you can call VOH Customer Appeals at 315-824-1111

If your concern remains unresolved, you can write take the following action(s):

- Write to the New York State Public Service Commission (PSC), Three Empire State Plaza, Albany, NY 12223.
- Call the PSC's toll-free Helpline at **1-800-342-3377**, Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- File a complaint online at: <http://www.dps.ny.gov/complaints.html>.
- Call the PSC's Emergency Hotline for pending termination of service – 1-800-342-3355, between 7:30 a.m. and 7:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.
- You can also visit the PSC at any time for more information online at <http://www.dps.ny.gov/> or <http://www.askpsc.com/>

If your complaint involves a VOH bill, you will not be asked to pay the disputed portion of the bill while the matter is being reviewed by the PSC. However, the remaining balance of the bill in question and any future bills should be paid when due.

Power Disturbance

All electrical systems are subject to occasional, uncontrollable events, such as severe weather conditions or accidents involving utility poles or wires. These events can result in electrical disturbances, such as high and low voltage conditions or power spikes that can damage or affect the operation of your electrical equipment, including appliances. Please be aware that it is your responsibility to protect your equipment against the possible effects of power disturbances.

Third-Party Notification Service.

If circumstances make it difficult for you to keep track of your VOH account, you can designate a friend, relative or agency to receive a notice from us whenever your service is at risk of being terminated. The person or agency is not responsible for paying your bill, but can help you make sure you avoid an interruption.

For Emergencies call VOH - Need Service call a Contractor.

For electricity, natural gas or carbon monoxide emergencies between the hours of 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, call VOH 315-824-1111 or 315-824-2120.

For after hour or holiday electricity, natural gas or carbon monoxide emergencies, please call 844-824-1100.

If there is an accident that is life threatening or may cause property damage involving utility poles, utility wires, or gas utility infrastructure, please dial 911 immediately.

For all non-utility emergency services (furnace, stove or oven, low/no heat, second opinions, no hot water, heating air conditioning or appliance repair), please contact a certified appliance professional. Qualified, licensed, electricians, plumbers, heating contractors, or appliance repair professionals should install any electrical wiring, natural gas lines, change appliance connectors, or check service lines running from the meter to your appliances. This is the responsibility of the property owner, along with the maintenance and repair of these lines to ensure safe and proper installation and operation.

VILLAGE OF HAMILTON
ELECTRIC and NATURAL GAS
SPECIAL SERVICES NOTICE

Please check any of the statements below that apply to you. Complete the form and mail it to the address below. This form will ensure that you are afforded all the protections you are entitled.

Village of Hamilton
3 East Broad Street
P.O. Box 119
Hamilton, New York 13346-0119

I am at least 62 years of age or disabled or blind and live alone.

Everyone in my household is at least 62 years old or blind or disabled or 18 years old or younger.

Someone in my household uses life sustaining equipment.

Please send me more information about the VOH's special services that are described above.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Day Time Phone: _____ Evening Phone: _____

Cell Phone: _____ Email: _____

Address: _____ Village Town _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

VOH Electric Account # _____

VOH Natural Gas Account # _____

Signature _____

Third-Party Notification

Please let me know if this customer's bill is overdue or if the service might be turned off. I understand that I am not responsible for paying the bill.

Third Party Name:

Daytime phone:

Evening phone:

Address:

Town/City:

State:

ZIP:

Third Party Signature_____ Date_____

Customer Signature_____ Date_____