

UTILITIES

Power and telephone lines crisscross our neighborhoods, and water flows into our homes. In today's modern world, these utilities have become virtual necessities. Therefore it is important to know where to find information when you have questions and whom to contact when there's a problem.

Electricity

Most South Dakota consumers receive their electric power from a municipal, cooperative or investor-owned provider. If you have a quality of service or billing dispute with your electric provider, the first and best course of action is to contact the provider directly to resolve the problem. If that is unsuccessful, consumer affairs representatives at the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) can assist you and your utility provider in reaching a resolution. PUC can be reached at 1-800-332-1782.

For a listing of electric providers and their contact information, visit the PUC's website at www.puc.sd.gov and select "Energy" and "Electric."

Telecommunications

The South Dakota Public Utilities Commission can help consumers understand the elements of their telephone bill or aid when billing or quality of service disputes occur. Additionally, PUC representatives provide assistance to consumers who experience quality of service issues with their wireless telecommunications service.

Billing or contractual service issues with wireless telecommunications providers should be reported to the Attorney General's Office, Division of Consumer Protection, 1-800-300-1986 or 605-773-4400. Consumers may also contact the Federal Communications Commission at <http://www.fcc.gov/complaints> to report concerns or complaints about telecommunications providers.

Water

Several types of organizations provide water service in South Dakota. If you have a concern about water quality, service, or billing, contact your water supplier directly to discuss these issues. You may also wish to contact the South Dakota Department of Environment and Natural Resources for water quality questions, 605-773-3754.

As a customer of a utility service provider, you have an obligation to pay for the services you use. There may be times when you have difficulty meeting those financial obligations. Early and honest communication with the utility company is one of the best first steps you can make to work your way

SOUTH DAKOTA OFFICE OF ATTORNEY GENERAL

**CONSUMER
PROTECTION**

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1-800-300-1986

This handout is for informational purposes and should not be construed as legal advice or as a policy of the South Dakota Attorney General. If you need advice on a particular issue, you should consult a private attorney or other experts.

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through the challenging situation. You should also be aware of the following helpful tools.

- **Low Income Energy Assistance Program.** Qualifying consumers may apply to the Office of Energy Assistance within the South Dakota Department of Social Services for the Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) that provides payment for some home heating costs. Refer to the *Reference Guide* section for contact information.
- **Weatherization Assistance Program.** The South Dakota Department of Social Services' Weatherization Assistance Program helps qualifying residents make their homes more energy efficient through weatherization improvements. The improvements are completed by four different community action programs serving specific counties. Refer to the Reference Guide for contact information.
- **Lifeline and Link-Up Telephone Assistance Programs.** Most South Dakota telephone companies offer Lifeline and Link-Up programs for their qualifying customers. Lifeline offers a discount on basic local telephone service. Link-Up provides a discount on the installation or activation for new telephone service. Applicants must meet certain eligibility requirements. Enhanced Lifeline and Link-Up programs are available for residents of tribal lands.
- **Electric and Natural Gas Utility Budgeting Services.** Although not a discount program, balanced billing offered by electric or natural gas providers can be a valuable tool for managing your budget. With balanced billing, the utility company reviews your past bills to determine a monthly average. You are billed this average amount each month, regardless of how much energy you actually use. Some months your energy use is higher, some months it's lower. But you always pay the same amount. The company tracks monthly usage monitors your account and lets you know if adjustments to the balanced billing are necessary.

PLEASE NOTE: *If someone calls unexpectedly claiming to be from your utility company and demanding payment, don't panic and don't send any money. Hang up and call your utility company directly to verify your account balance and report the scam. It's also helpful to report this and other imposter scams to the Attorney General's Office, Division of Consumer Protection, 1-800-300-1986 or 605-773-4400, so they can issue a public warning.*

Utility information provided courtesy of the Public Utilities Commission.