

City of Richmond Department of Public Utilities COVID-19 Customer Service FAQs

The City of Richmond Department of Public Utilities and Richmond Gas Works continues with non-disconnection of utility services and remains committed to the safety of all during **COVID-19**. Following CDC-recommended guidelines, DPU continues to focus on the health and protection of our customers as well as that of our technicians. As a result of recent COVID-related restrictions, DPU will once again limit services to emergencies, new consumer connections and restoration of water and gas services until further notice. To avoid financial hardship at the end of the pandemic, customers are encouraged to contact us to learn more about extended payment plan options. Only collection activity for utility services rendered prior to March 16, 2020 or for storm water-only service will continue. We thank you for your patience and understanding as we respond to the evolving impacts of COVID-19.

Our Customer Care Call Center message (804-646-4646) reflects our current status and we invite you to visit our website www.rva.gov/public-utilities for general account information.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. I have a natural gas emergency. What should I do?

If you have an emergency related to gas, or a gas leak, please leave immediately and go to an area where the odor of gas is no longer present and call 911.

2. I have a non-natural gas related utility emergency. What should I do?

If you have an emergency related to water, sewer or carbon monoxide please call 646-4646 and select Option 1 IMMEDIATELY.

3. I don't have a utility emergency. Can I still speak to a representative about my account?

To avoid long wait times, we encourage customers to visit www.rva.gov/public-utilities for account information or email dpucustserv@richmondgov.com with a detailed account inquiry. Please allow up to three (3) business days for us to research your inquiry and provide a written response. The phone lines at (804) 646-4646 are open, however high call volume is expected.

4. Should I dial 311 if I'm unable to reach your office?

No. The 311 Citizen Service and Response Call Center is unable to respond to DPU billing, payment, connection and disconnection requests. However, you may report stormwater, sewer and streetlight issues by calling 3-1-1 or using www.rva311.com.

5. How can I pay my bill?

Due to social distancing guidelines, we encourage customers to use one of the options listed below.

- One-time payment:** [CLICK HERE TO PAY WITH KUBRA EZ-PAY](#). Have your account number and zip code available.
- Self-Service:** Call (804) 646-4646 and follow the prompts.
- Check or money order:** Mail your payment using the enclosed envelope with your bill.
OUR MAILING ADDRESS CHANGED IN JUNE! To ensure timely receipt and proper credit of your utility payments, please update your records. This includes automatic bill payment services and personally addressed payments.

☛ New remittance address: **City of Richmond Utilities PO Box 71210 Charlotte, NC 28272-1210**

- d. **City Hall Dropbox:** Located on the 10th Street side. Please do not deposit cash. Checks and money orders only.
- e. **In person:** Visit our payment center at City Hall (900 E. Broad Street).

IMPORTANT: Please note that in support of continued social distancing guidelines, visitors are required to sign in at the guard's desk and wear a mask or face covering while conducting business at this location. Please obey all signs upon entering and exiting the City Hall location.

6. Is my utility payment still due during COVID-19?

Yes. DPU is continuing to bill for regular monthly usage. We encourage all customers that are able, to continue to make utility payments as bills are received. However, we are offering flexible payment terms of up to 12 months, regardless of your balance, upon request. Based upon your payment history the normally required down payment can be waived. Please note that payment term amounts must be paid in full each month along with your current monthly charges. *See #11 for additional resources.* Call us today at (804) 646-4646 to discuss your options.

7. Will my services be disconnected if I am unable to pay my bill on the due date?

No. Public health and safety remains a priority and DPU remains committed to helping our customers through this time. However, we strongly encourage delinquent customers to take action now to avoid future interruption of utility services. If you have specific questions, call us at (804) 646-4646. Agents are standing by to assist Monday through Friday 8:00 am – 5:00 pm.

8. What company do you use for collections? How can I reach them?

Ballato Law Firm handles debt collections for DPU. Once an account is transferred to Ballato Law Firm, the customer must contact Ballato directly for all account matters. Their agents are available Monday through Friday 8:00 am – 5:00 pm to address your account needs. You can dial them directly at (804) 433-1060 or visit their website www.ballatolaw.com to send an email or submit a payment using a credit or debit card. Collection activity for utility services rendered prior to March 16, 2020 or for storm water-only service remain in effect. Customers are encouraged to contact Ballato immediately to discuss account concerns and explore payment options.

9. My services were restored because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Will I lose my service immediately after COVID-19?

If your services were restored due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we strongly encourage you to contact us promptly at (804) 646-4646 to participate in our payment plan programs. Agents are standing by to assist you.

10. What type of notification will I receive prior to disconnection after COVID-19?

At the end of the state of emergency for COVID-19, DPU will resume normal collection activity. If your services are scheduled for disconnection, you will be notified through your monthly bill. To avoid interruption, we encourage you to contact us to establish payment terms.

11. What resources are available to assist customers experiencing financial difficulties?

We understand the continued financial uncertainty of customers during this time and are working to assist customers through post-pandemic impacts. We continue to encourage customers to explore the following assistance programs:

- **MetroCare Water Program** – This water bill payment assistance program provides funds to eligible families and individuals who are having difficulty paying their primary water bills due to financial concerns. There is an application process and ratepayers can receive up to \$500 per applicant if approved. For more information, call (804) 646-4646.
- **MetroCare Heat Program** – This heating bill payment assistance program provides funds to eligible families and individuals who are having trouble paying their primary heating bills due to a financial difficulty or other special hardship. The program period began Dec. 15. Residents within Richmond Gas Works' service territory may apply for funds through MetroCare. For more information, call (804) 646-4646.

- **SeniorCare Program** – This program caters to the unique needs of seniors 65 years of age and older in the Richmond metropolitan community. Senior customers can sign up for this program and take advantage of Winter Service Assurance, no late fees, security deposit waiver program, annual weatherization kit giveaways and third party notification. For more information, call (804) 646-4646.
- **Universal Payment Arrangement** – This program assists customers with managing their finances through the COVID-19 pandemic and proactively creates payment terms for residential customers more than 90 days in arrears with the exclusion of ELDERLY coded accounts and accounts currently on a BUDGET plan. The mass creation of the universal payment arrangement, began on June 1, 2020 and allows customers to pay the arrears in 6 or 12 monthly installments plus current charges as billed. Eligible customers are notified via their monthly bill.

12. For recordkeeping purposes, I submitted my payment with a self-addressed, stamped envelope, with a request for a copy of the receipt to be returned. When can I expect to receive the receipt?

Your next bill will show payments applied against balance owed. If you have additional questions, feel free to follow up via email at dpucustserv@richmondgov.com or call (804) 646-4646. Please take this time to update your records as our payment remittance address has changed: New remittance address: **City of Richmond Utilities PO Box 71210 Charlotte, NC 28272-1210**

13. I am moving to a new location and need a final bill. What should I do?

Please email your details to dpucustserv@richmondgov.com. The billing department will work to ensure that your final meter reading (from the move-out location) along with your start meter reading (for the move-in location) is processed for billing purposes. Please allow up to one billing cycle for your account to be finalized or adjusted as needed.

14. My account was billing on actual meter readings prior to the City closing. I am now receiving a bill based on estimated usage. Why is this happening?

When an actual meter read is not available for billing purposes, DPU will estimate the account based on historical usage. We will diligently work to resolve any account issues. If you have a question or concern, please email us at dpucustserv@richmondgov.com with your detailed request.

15. I have an escalated account issue requiring immediate attention. How can I reach someone?

If you need to speak with someone regarding an escalated issue, please send us an email at dpucustserv@richmondgov.com. Please provide a brief description of your request and indicate that you would like to speak with a supervisor. Please allow up to two (2) business days for a supervisor to contact you.

16. Why can't DPU provide free water to its residents?

As this pandemic emphasizes, clean and safe water is one of the most valuable resources in the protection of public health and safety. It is also one often taken for granted. The City's sole source of drinking water is the James River. Water has to be pulled from the river and then treated, stored, distributed, and routed to homes and businesses. This is no small feat and requires a significant amount of capital and human resources, not to mention the added burden an aging infrastructure places on a utility. Rates paid by consumers help to ensure the water you receive at the tap is clean and safe and there when you need it.