



Frequently Asked Questions: New Proposed Customer Service Regulations for Richmond Utilities

1. What is this new regulation about?

This regulation sets standard rules for how the Department of Public Utilities handles customer accounts, billing, payments, and disputes. It covers services like water, gas, wastewater, and stormwater. The goal is to treat all customers fairly, without discrimination, and follow national guidelines for utility best practices.

2. How will this affect my utility bills?

Bills will still come monthly or on your usual schedule, but the rules make billing clearer. For example, meters should be read every 30 days, with limits on estimated bills (no more than three in a row unless there's a good reason; bad weather). If your bill is estimated, it will say so, and you'll know how it was calculated based on your past usage.

3. When do I need to pay a security deposit?

All customers are required to have a deposit. For homes, it's \$25 for water/wastewater, \$50 for gas heating, or \$50 for non-heating gas. Deposits earn a small interest (0.25% to start) if held over six months.

4. What if I can't pay my bill on time?

If your bill goes past 45 days and payment has not been received, it's delinquent. You'll get notices on your next bills warning about possible disconnect. You can set up a payment plan: pay 10% down and the rest over up to 12 months (or more if you show financial hardship). Keep paying current bills on time during the plan. If you default, you might lose plan options for a year.

5. When can the utility disconnect or restrict my service?

Service won't be disconnected or restricted during extreme weather (below 32°F for gas, below 25°F or above 92°F heat index for water), emergencies, holidays, or if you have documentation from a licensed doctor verifying a life-threatening situation for someone at home. You also get protection if you're in a payment plan or disputing a bill. Disconnects only happen after two late notices and if the account is over 60 days past due.

6. How are estimated bills calculated?

If the meter can't be read (if it's blocked), the bill uses your average actual usage from the past 12 months. For homes without irrigation, it's a simple average; with irrigation, it considers seasons (higher in summer). You'll be notified if your bill is estimated. The utility

will try at least twice to read the meter before estimating. Too many estimates could lead to disconnect if you don't allow access.

7. Can I get a bill adjustment for a water leak?

Yes, if usage is over twice your normal amount, the leak wasn't your fault (negligence), and you fix it quickly (within 30 days). Provide proof of repair. The adjustment refunds part of the extra charges for water and wastewater. You can only get one adjustment per year, and the adjustment must be requested within 60 days of bill date.

8. What about adjustments for water not going into the sewer, like for watering lawns?

If you use a lot of water that doesn't enter the wastewater system (irrigation or pools), you can install a submeter to measure it. Wastewater bills then subtract that amount, but at least 30% of your water use is still charged for basics. You are required to pay for the submeter and testing (every 3 years for homes, yearly for businesses). Apply with a plan and non-refundable fee (\$150); it's approved if it accurately tracks non-sewer water.

9. How do I appeal a utility decision I disagree with?

File a written appeal within 30 days, explaining why you disagree with your bill, and provide any documentation to help explain. A manager reviews it within 10 business days. If you are not satisfied with the decision, you may appeal again within 15 days for a final department review in 30 days. Service stays on if you pay the undisputed balance of your bill, and disputed charges are paused until the appeals are completed.

10. When do these new rules start, and how will I learn more?

The rules take effect upon adoption by the Director, estimated May 2026. For details, check the full regulation on the DPU website or contact the Department of Public Utilities.