

**Emergency Billing Relief Program Manual**

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# Introduction

In Alberta, the wildfire season spans from March 1 to October 31. During this period, there are instances when wildfires pose a threat to communities, leading government officials to issue mandatory evacuation orders for residents. In the past, during evacuations of communities like Fort McMurray, Waterton Lakes and High Level, the Alberta Utilities Commission took the initiative to coordinate a process ensuring that utility billing for those affected was suspended. This meant that residents did not have to worry about their electricity and natural gas bills during the catastrophic situation.

In May 2023, several communities in the northern and central regions were evacuated due to wildfires. AUC staff organized virtual meetings and invited industry stakeholders with customers in these affected communities to discuss potential billing and payment issues, as well as communication plans.

Through these discussions led by the AUC staff, criteria for billing relief (bill amounts that will be credited on customer bills), the process itself and the roles and responsibilities of the involved industry parties were established. These details are outlined in this manual and apply for the 2023 wildfire season.

The program is known as the Emergency Billing Relief Program (EBRP).

# Customer (site) eligibility

The spirit of the EBRP is to target individuals, couples, families and small independent businesses. To balance the intention of targeting this group with administrative and practical considerations, owners of electric distribution systems and gas distribution systems (DFOs) will apply the following criteria to identify site eligibility.

This program applies to residential, farm, irrigation and small commercial rate class sites that consume less than 250,000 kilowatt hours of electricity per year and to residential, farm, small commercial or other natural gas customer sites that consume less than 2,500 gigajoules per year (based on the most recent 12 months of historical usage data prior to the event occurrence), with some exceptions. Specifically, sites within the following rate classes are not eligible for this program:

1. streetlights rates
2. flat metered rates
3. oilfield rates
4. transmission connected rates
5. sites associated with SIC codes representing oilfield, mining, gas processing or other industrial classifications (if available)

# Included evacuation events and calculation of the billing-relief period

For an event to qualify for billing relief due to a 2023 wildfire evacuation event under this program, the following criteria must be met:

1. Be a mandatory evacuation order as stated on the Alberta Emergency Alert website <<https://www.alberta.ca/alberta-emergency-alert.aspx>>.
2. Be a mandatory evacuation order lasting more than 96 hours
3. Beyond the initial 96 hours, the number of days eligible for billing relief (billing-relief period) will be calculated to be inclusive of the day the evacuation order was issued and the day the evacuation order was lifted.

\*Example: if an eligible site has a mandatory evacuation order issued on May 13, at 11:02 p.m., and the evacuation order is lifted on May 20, at 8 a.m., billing relief will be provided for a full eight days. All distribution charges included in the tariff bill file and associated AESO charges from May 13 to May 20 will be credited.

1. For eligible sites that were subject to more than one mandatory evacuation order, if less than 96 hours pass between the issuance of the evacuation orders, the period from the day of the issuance of the first evacuation order to the day of the lifting of the last evacuation order (inclusive) will be considered the evacuation billing-relief period.

* In a situation where the evacuation order was lifted, and tariff billing was not relieved during the evacuation order period, all distribution charges and associated AESO charges during the billing-relief period will be credited.
* In a situation where the evacuation order remains in effect, tariff billing and associated AESO charges for this entire period would be suspended. Any associated billing credit to be presented on a customer bill as a single billing-relief period.

1. If a mandatory evacuation order was lifted and no new mandatory evacuation order was issued within 96 consecutive hours, this will end the billing-relief period. Any mandatory evacuation order issued after that time will be considered as a new billing-relief event, again applying all of the above criteria, and if eligible, presented as a separate and new billing-relief period and associated billing-relief credit to the customer.
2. DFOs are expected to communicate with each other to best ensure the billing-relief periods applied to each eligible site within their overlapping service areas will be aligned among them.

# Process and responsibilities by party

## DFOs

### At the start of an evacuation event

1. Create a tracking form to document evacuation events impacting customers in your service area with the following fields included, at minimum:
2. Site ID,
3. Retailer ID,
4. Retailer name,
5. Evacuation start date,
6. Evacuation end date (if known),
7. Total number of days evacuated (if end date is known, otherwise status shows as in progress).
8. Consider training customer support staff on the program in order to field incoming customer calls and questions.

### During and at the end of an evacuation event

1. Monitoring and tracking of evacuation events:
2. Monitor the Alberta Wildfire emergency updates website for status of evacuation orders within their service area.
3. Create, and update as needed, a list of sites impacted by 2023 mandatory evacuation order announcements that fall within the program’s customer eligibility and track the associated dates, times and duration of the mandatory evacuation orders and associated lifting of the mandatory evacuation orders.

\*In cases where the conditions described under “Included evacuation events and calculation of the billing-relief period” of Section 3 of this manual are met and the billing-relief period has ended, provide the applicable billing-relief period within the tracking list.

1. DFOs are to use best efforts to cross reference their recorded start and end date of the mandatory evacuation orders for affected areas within their overlapping service areas.
2. Provide to each retailer of record the list of sites applicable to that retailer of record. Provide any updates regarding site or evacuation status to the applicable retailer of record within five business days of the update being known.
3. Provide to the Alberta Electric System Operator a list of sites impacted by the evacuation order(s) and the total number of days evacuated by site (electric DFOs only).

#### Calculation and administration of billing relief

1. For eligible sites that experience an ongoing evacuation event:
   * 1. No billing actions will be taken by DFOs until the evacuation order has been lifted for 96 consecutive hours, to enable the calculation of a full billing-relief period and to prevent bill issuance during an evacuation event.
     2. Upon the lifting of an evacuation event plus 96 hours, for each eligible site each DFO will either:
   1. Issue only a single tariff bill file (TBF) using their ability to suspend billing, and provide a one-time charge (OTC) credit offsetting the portion of the bill that pertains to the evacuation event. The TBF should include a separate line item showing the billing-relief period and billing-relief amount (under the OTC field), when applicable.

OR

* 1. First issue a TBF with original charges, and within two business days, issue a TBF with an OTC credit offsetting the distribution tariff charges included in the previous TBF that pertains to the evacuation event.

1. All amounts that would normally be billed through a TBF for the period of an evacuation event for eligible sites will form the billing-relief amount to be provided in the one-time charge credit.

### Following an evacuation event

1. For 2023 wildfire events that have passed in advance of this procedures manual, DFOs are to send a full list of impacted sites to the retailer of record as soon as possible. For each site, indicate:
2. If site has been destroyed:

* For these cases, and as per normal processes, no billing should be issued for these sites. Additionally these sites should not be allocated energy in load settlement on a go forward basis.

1. If site has not been destroyed, and the evacuation order has been lifted and 96 hours have subsequently passed without a further evacuation:

* For these cases, the circumstances trigger the issuance of a billing credit as per Section 3 of this manual. DFOs are to send a TBF showing the OTC credit for these sites as soon as possible and the retailer of record is to include that credit in their next billing cycle.

1. If site has not been destroyed and is subject an ongoing evacuation order, treat as an ongoing evacuation event as per Section 4.1.2.1 of this manual.
2. Keep track of all billing-relief credits provided, associated calculations, and associated evacuation orders.
3. After the current wildfire season (ending October 31, 2023), distribution utilities can apply to the AUC to recover the billing credits provided to customers. Reasonable costs incurred to administer such credits may be considered on a case by case basis, which must be applied for with sufficient and detailed supporting evidence for the additional administrative costs. The evidence must show that the incremental administrative costs were unavoidable and explain how these costs are not already recovered under existing rates.

## Retailers

### Before an evacuation event

Consider training customer support staff on the program in order to field incoming customer calls and questions.

### During and at the end of an evacuation event

* 1. Receive and store evacuation lists from the DFOs for which you are a retailer of record.
  2. For sites identified in the evacuation list:
  3. Pause normal bill issuance processes until a TBF with the associated billing credit amount is received.
  4. Use the TBF with the billing-relief credit and a credit of AESO charges to create a customer bill for the billing period, including the billing-relief period and billing-relief credit.
  5. Ideally, retailers will present the billing-relief period and billing-relief credit as a separate line item or text within the relevant customer bill titled “Evacuation period billing credit.” Alternatively, retailers are encouraged to clearly explain these one-time credits to their customers using their preferred communication method.
  6. In anticipation of potential customer inquiries, retailers are encouraged to cross-reference the list of impacted sites with unsolicited de-energization requests issued by DFOs for affected sites (unsolicited de-energization requests may come through in response to an emergency order from local authorities).
  7. Issue the bill.
  8. Do not issue any new de-energization requests or new de-enrollment requests for sites included in an evacuation list from a DFO.

### Following an evacuation event

* 1. Keep track of all billing-relief credits provided and associated calculations.
  2. For 30 days after the end of a billing-relief period, retailers are encouraged to not pursue credit collection, de-energization or de-enrollment of outstanding amounts for impacted sites.

## The AESO

The AESO will provide credits to off-set the charges it issues to retailers and recover the cost of the credit through the AESO energy market trading charge, following the practice utilized for previous evacuation events.

## The AUC

### Before an evacuation event

* 1. Coordinate communication efforts across industry and with the government of Alberta.
  2. Provide FAQ to support DFO and retailer customer support teams.

### During an evacuation event

Coordinate communication efforts and troubleshoot unforeseen challenges across industry and with the government of Alberta.

### After an evacuation event

Once the current wildfire season concludes, the AUC will consult with stakeholders to formalize a billing relief process for future evacuation orders resulting from emergency events such as wildfires, floods or other natural disasters.