

Bulletin 2023-04

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Emergency Billing Relief Program for wildfire evacuation orders

The Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC) is initiating an Emergency Billing Relief Program (EBRP) that implements a temporary pause of electric and gas utility billing for individuals affected by 2023 wildfire evacuations in Alberta.

Under the EBRP, eligible utility customers impacted by a mandatory evacuation order will receive billing credits retroactively applied to the timeframe they were impacted by mandatory evacuations from wildfires in 2023.

During a billing pause period for customers who are under a mandatory evacuation order, outstanding utility bills will be temporarily paused, no late fees or penalties will be applied, and no disconnections will occur.

This coordinated effort with utility service providers aims to aid in alleviating the financial burden on those affected by mandatory evacuation orders and facilitate an efficient process for billing relief in the future.

The AUC has developed an EBRP manual that outlines the steps for utilities to follow during a mandatory evacuation order. The manual outlines processes for providing billing relief, ensures clarity and consistency in the billing relief process, and outlines the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders involved in the program.

The EBRP sets expectations and responsibilities across industry when a mandatory evacuation order is announced by the Alberta government. The EBRP was developed in collaboration with the entities overseen by the AUC, including stakeholders from electric and natural gas distribution utilities, competitive retailers, regulated service providers and the Alberta Electric System Operator (AESO).

The AUC previously implemented billing relief for affected residents following the Fort McMurray wildfire in 2016, the Waterton wildfire in 2017 and the High Level wildfire in 2019. Additional information is included in the [Emergency Billing Relief Program - Frequently asked questions](#) fact sheet.

Stakeholder responsibilities

1. Natural gas and electric distribution utilities:

- a. Identify the sites eligible for billing relief (relief will be provided in the form of a credit).

- b. Calculate the one-time billing credit applicable to each eligible site.
 - c. Pass this information to retailers as per the program manual.
 - d. Inform the AESO of the sites eligible for billing relief and the duration of the evacuation event by site (electric distribution utilities only).
 - e. 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.
- 2. AESO:**
- a. Provide off-set credits to invoices 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.
- 3. Retailers:**
- a. Pass on the one-time credits (i.e., for distribution and AESO charges) to their customers using their existing billing processes.
 - b. Retailers are encouraged to clearly explain these one-time credits to their customers using their preferred communication method.

Further details are available in the program manual.

Following the conclusion of the current wildfire season ending October 31, 2023, the AUC will consult with industry stakeholders to formalize a billing relief process for future evacuation orders resulting from emergency events such as wildfires, floods or other natural disasters.

For further information, please contact Sura Abdul-Razzak at sura.abdul-razzak@auc.ab.ca.

Alberta Utilities Commission