

DATE: September 9, 2015

TO: Subscribers

SUGGESTED DISTRIBUTION: Commissioners, TA Directors, HEAP Coordinators, Staff Development Coordinators

FROM: Phyllis D. Morris, Deputy Commissioner, Center for Employment and Economic Supports

SUBJECT: Changes to National Grid's Procedures for Elderly, Blind, or Disabled Households

EFFECTIVE DATE: Immediately

CONTACT PERSON: TA Program Questions: TA Bureau at 1-800-343-8859, ext. 4-9344

The purpose of this GIS is to inform Social Services Districts (SSDs) that National Grid (NG) has informed the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) that their procedures regarding Elderly, Blind, or Disabled (EBD) National Grid customers will be changing.

In accordance with the Home Energy Fair Practices Act (HEFPA), PSC-regulated utility companies refer to SSDs those families and individuals who have had their utilities disconnected or are threatened with a utility disconnection and are EBD.

At their discretion, NG has not previously terminated service to households identified as EBD or threatened those households with termination of service, and therefore, not sent LDSS-2338, "Notice of Utility Referral to DSS," forms for these households to SSDs.

Effective September 9, 2015, NG will begin issuing termination notices to those EBD households owing more than \$5,000 in arrears. Statewide, this will affect approximately 2,900 households.

Prior to this change, NG did not require customers identified as EBD to submit a renewal application and documentation in support of their EBD status. Effective immediately, NG will implement new procedures to verify the EBD status of customers identified as EBD. Affected customers will be notified by fact sheets, which will accompany EBD recertification packets (see attachments A and B).

As a result of these changes, SSDs may experience an increase in inquiries and office visits. Additionally, SSDs may see an increased number of LDSS-2338 referrals for these households as required by HEFPA.

When an SSD receives an LDSS-2338 referral for an EBD household, the SSD must, at a minimum, send a letter to that referred EBD household as described in 93 ADM-26. If the utility referral specifically states that the customer is blind, the SSD must take appropriate steps to ensure that SSD Adult Protective Services is involved to coordinate applications for financial assistance to continue or to restore service.

For information on procedures followed by utilities when terminating service to an EBD household, on required actions of SSDs when an LDSS-2338 is received, and on other SSD implications of HEFPA, see 93 ADM-26.

For information on processing Temporary Assistance (TA) requests for energy emergencies, see 14TA/DC048.

For information on meeting the emergency/immediate needs of TA applicants/recipients, see 02 ADM-02.

Attachment A: Fact Sheet

Attachment B: EBD Recertification

Important Information Regarding Special Protections for Residential NY Customers

In accordance with New York State Public Service Commission rules and the Home Energy Fair Practices Act, National Grid provides special protections for elderly, blind and disabled persons; persons with medical emergencies; and persons who rely on electrically operated life-sustaining equipment. This brochure contains basic information about National Grid's policies and procedures for special protections and your rights as a NY residential customer.

Elderly, Blind or Disabled (EBD)

If you are over the age of 62, visually impaired, receiving social security disability and/or supplemental security income or receiving military benefits due to a service-related disability *and* all other members of your household are also over the age of 62, age 18 or younger, visually impaired, receiving social security disability and/or supplemental security income or receiving military benefits due to a service-related disability then your account qualifies for elderly, blind or disabled protection.

National Grid will attempt to reach an adult member of your household either by phone or in person at least 72 hours prior to terminating service for non-payment. If we are unable to make arrangements with you in order to prevent shut off of your service, we will hold your account for 15 business days and issue a referral to your local Social Service District (SSD) to contact you. This referral may result in a letter being sent from the SSD to your household, or may result in a caseworker visit to your household. If a service interruption does occur, a representative from National Grid will visit your home within 24 hours following the interruption in order to assist you, if needed, to establish a plan for restoration of service. If you wish to apply for emergency assistance to address your utility termination or termination notice, you may apply at your local SSD. Information regarding Temporary Assistance programs and resources is available on line at www.myBenefits.ny.gov.

You may be able to receive this EBD protection by contacting National Grid and advising the phone representative of your household's circumstances. You may be required to recertify your EBD protection annually by providing documentation which verifies eligibility for all household members such as a birth certificate, driver's license, or a copy of an SSD/SSI award letter.

Please be advised that because EBD protection does not safeguard you from termination for non-payment, you are still responsible for your bills and should make reasonable efforts to pay for services rendered.

Medical Emergency

If you or a member of your household suffers from a serious illness or a medical condition that severely affects your well-being then your account may qualify for medical emergency protection.

Initial medical emergency protection can be obtained by having your physician or qualified official of your local board of health contact National Grid by telephone to certify your condition. Within 5 business days of their call, your physician or qualified official of your local board of health must then explain to National Grid in writing the nature of your medical emergency, provide its expected duration and advise why the absence of service would aggravate it. Your initial medical emergency protection will be valid for 30 days.

In order to renew your medical emergency protection, your physician or qualified official of your local board of health must follow the same procedure outlined for the initial protection. In addition, you will need to demonstrate an inability to pay for service by completing a financial statement for which you may need to provide supporting documentation. You will be notified of the renewal requirements in the approval letter which will be sent to you when you are granted initial medical emergency protection. Depending upon the documentation received from your physician or qualified official of your local board of health, your renewed medical protection may last for up to 60 days if your condition is chronic. The same renewal procedure must be followed each time you request an extension of your account's medical emergency protection.

Life Support

If you or a member of your household suffer from a medical condition which requires utility service to operate a life-sustaining device such as an iron lung or a dialysis machine, your account may qualify for life support protection.

Life Support certification by a medical doctor or qualified official of your local board of health shall remain effective until terminated by the New York State Public Service Commission or its designee. While your account is protected due to life support, National Grid cannot terminate your service for non-payment or refuse to restore service which has already been terminated. Additionally, the life support protection code on your account and special tags placed upon your meters will alert our phone representatives and field service workers of your household's special needs and alert us to your situation during unplanned power outages.

Initial life support protection can be obtained by contacting National Grid and advising the phone representative your household's circumstances. Any ongoing collection activity on your account will be suspended for 30 days while we provide you with a life support protection application which you must then complete and return. Upon receipt of your completed application, a certification form will be sent to your physician or qualified official of your local board of health. Once that form has been returned to us, the equipment listed will be reviewed for qualification. If your equipment does not meet the criteria for life support protection – for example insulin, a nebulizer or air conditioning – you will be contacted to discuss medical emergency protection.

Life support protection must be renewed annually following the same initial procedure described above.

Please be advised that while your account may be eligible for these protections, you are still responsible for your bills. If you're having difficulty paying your National Grid bill, please call our Credit & Collections Department at 1-800-443-1837. We will determine your eligibility for a payment agreement that considers your financial circumstances.

You have the right to request a conference with the New York Department of Public Service Commission, please direct your inquiry to **1-800-342-3377**.

IMPORTANT NOTICE RESPONSE REQUIRED

Customer Name
Mailing Address
City, State zip code

This is an important notice.
Please have it translated.
Este é um aviso importante. Queira mandá-lo traduzir.
Este es un aviso importante. Sírvase mandarlo traducir.
Avis important. Veuillez traduire immédiatement.
Questa è un' informazione importante, si prega di tradurla.
ĐÂY LÀ MỘT BÀN THÔNG CÁO QUAN TRỌNG
XIN VUI LÒNG CHO DỊCH LẠI THÔNG CÁO ẤY
Это очень важное сообщение.
Пожалуйста, попросите чтобы
вам его перевели.

Dear Customer,

We wanted to let you know that the **special protection for Elderly, Blind, and/or Disabled customers** currently on your account is due to expire.

In order to try and preserve this special protection, please answer the few short questions on the reverse side of this letter, provide any supporting documentation, and return the letter and documentation to one of the following:

National Grid
Mail: Accounts Processing/EBD, C1 **Fax:** 877-303-1992 **Email:** ElderlyRecert@nationalgrid.com
300 Erie Blvd West
Syracuse, NY 13202

Please be aware that completed renewal forms and any required documentation must be received by National Grid within seven days (7) to avoid cancellation of your special protection status. If the forms are not returned within the allotted timeframe, National Grid will assume this protection is no longer needed.

We realize that these are difficult financial times for many of our customers, but it is important to note that this protection does not relieve you of your obligation to pay your bill. ***Failure to pay current bills or make an arrangement on past due balances will subject you to normal collection activity.***

We have payment plans available that may be able to assist you with getting your account current. If you have a past due balance, please contact our Credit & Collections Department at 1-800-443-1837, available Monday-Friday, 7:00am–9:00pm and Saturday, 7:00am – 5:00pm, to discuss payment options.

Thank you for helping us provide the best possible service for you.

National Grid

The form on the reverse side must be completed and received by National Grid within seven (7) days of the date of this letter. Once reviewed and if approved a confirmation letter will follow confirming that your protection is still in effect.



Account Number: _____ Contact Phone # ____ - ____ - _____

For Service at: _____

Maintain Elderly, Blind, and/or Disabled Protection on my account.

- **Elderly:** Valid proof includes copy of Driver’s License, Birth Certificate, Passport, Military ID or Marriage Certificate
- **Blind:** Medical letter signed by physician
- **Disabled:** Proof of receiving SSI or SSD or Military proof of disability for a service connected disability
 - All members are 62 years of age or over, and/or age 18 or under
 - All members are Blind (legally or Medically)
 - All members have a permanent disability
 - All members qualify for at least one of the above

Remove Elderly Protection Status.

- All household members are not 62 years of age or over, and/or 18 or under, disabled, and blind.
Please explain any additional information: _____

Please list names of ALL household members	Date of Birth	Blind (Legally/Medically) Please <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Permanently Disabled Please <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Third Party Notification: This program allows you to select a person to act on your behalf if you receive a collection notice from us. We send a copy of the collection notice to your designated third party who can look into the situation and help make payment arrangements. The third party can be a friend, relative, or member of the clergy. However, the third party is not responsible for nor obligated to pay your bill.

- I designate the following person to be contacted for Third Party Notification. I understand the contact person is *not* responsible for paying my electric and/or gas bill.

Third Party Name:	
Address:	
Telephone Number:	

Account holder’s signature _____ Date: _____