

SECTION 21 UTILITIES

FOR EMERGENCIES OR OUTAGES

Electric Power Outage: Houston & surrounding areas

CenterPoint Energy

☎ 713-207-2222

☎ 1-800-332-7143

Entergy (serving parts of Harris, Waller, and most of Montgomery Counties)

☎ 1-800-968-8243

San Bernard Electric Cooperative (serving parts of Montgomery and Waller Counties)

☎ 1-800-364-3171

Gas Leaks:

CenterPoint Energy

☎ 713-659-2111

☎ 1-888-876-5786

Water Off or Low Pressure:

City of Houston Call Center

☎ 3-1-1

Outside Houston

☎ Call the municipal water provider

Lone Star 8-1-1 – Call Before You Dig Hotline

Before digging anywhere on your property, it is wise to have all underground cable locations marked. The utility companies provide this service free to consumers. By calling the hotline below, all utility companies will be notified and will schedule a time to mark the utility lines. Call Before You Dig Hotline:

☎ 8-1-1

☎ 1-800-669-8344

SECTION 21.1 ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Comprehensive Energy Assistance

Programs (CEAP) help low-income households meet their energy needs. Approved households may receive help with electric and/or gas bills. Families must apply every year for assistance. For information, assistance, an application, or to locate the CEAP provider for a county, call 2-1-1 or the county provider.

☎ 2-1-1

Harris (BakerRipley, formerly Neighborhood Centers)

☎ 713-590-2327

💻 www.neighborhood-centers.org/locations/utility-assistance-program

CEAP programs for counties other than Harris:

Fort Bend (Galveston County Community Action Council)

☎ 281-342-3012

💻 www.gccac.org
(keyword: programs, utilities assistance)

Montgomery (Brazos Valley Community Action Agency)

☎ 936-856-7036

☎ 1-855-856-3980

💻 www.bvcaa.org/programs/utility-assistance

Waller (Brazos Valley Community Action Agency)

☎ 979-595-1199

☎ 1-855-252-1467

💻 www.bvcaa.org/programs/utility-assistance

ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Many social and assistance ministries offer utility assistance, though many require a disconnect notice before they can help. To find the nearest location, see Section 6.2. Most utility programs also offer utility assistance. Some offer assistance directly while others work through community organizations. People needing assistance with utilities are encouraged to contact their provider for resources that may be available, including payment plan options.

Some utilities also reduce or waive deposits for people ages 65 and older.

The **2-1-1 Texas/United Way HELPLINE** connects callers with health and human service programs in the community. Highly trained and knowledgeable HELPLINE Specialists answer calls 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. 2-1-1 specialists can identify utility assistance programs.

☎ 2-1-1

💻 www.unitedwayhouston.org/our-211-helpline/
(to email 211 or to search the directory online)

Brazos Valley Community Action Agency assists Waller County residents with utility needs.

☎ 979-595-1199

☎ 1-855-252-1467

💻 www.bvcaa.org/programs/utility-assistance

City of Houston Public Works offers to residents ages 60 and over who receive their water from the City of Houston the ability to apply for late fee waivers. Residents must complete an application, show proof of age, and live in a single-family home.

☎ 713-371-1400

Crisis Assistance Center helps Montgomery County residents with utility needs.

☎ 936-539-9211

💻 www.cac-mctx.org

Fort Bend County Senior Services will help with past due bills and disconnect notices. Call for an appointment at the nearest location and what documents are needed.

☎ 281-238-3502 (Rosenberg office)

☎ 281-403-8050 (Missouri City office)

💻 www.fortbendcountytexas.gov
(keyword: social services)

Harris County Office of Social Services has funds to help with gas, electric, and water assistance. Call for information and for an appointment.

☎ 713-696-7900

Salvation Army provides utility assistance to Fort Bend County residents.


☎ 281-207-2500

Reliant Energy Beat the Heat Centers allow people to be in a cool place all day while minimizing their own electricity usage. Beat the Heat Centers are at public locations during the summer months. There are Beat the Heat Centers at the Acres Homes, Denver Harbor, Magnolia, Northeast, and Sunnyside Multi-Service Centers. For information and hours, call:

☎ 2-1-1

Water Assistance to Elderly Residents


(W.A.T.E.R.) Fund provides water assistance to people ages 60 and older who receive water from the City of Houston. Approved people can receive up to \$100 per month for six months to help offset water costs. At the end of six months, participants may reapply.


 713-371-1400

Weatherization Assistance Program


The **Weatherization Assistance Program** helps low-income households reduce their energy costs by providing energy efficiency home improvements. Examples of assistance include caulking, weather-stripping, insulation, duct-work, or helping with the repair or replacement of heating and cooling systems. For information, assistance, an application, or to locate the Weatherization provider for a county, call 2-1-1 or the county provider.


The **2-1-1 Texas/United Way HELPLINE** connects callers with health and human service programs in the community. Highly trained and knowledgeable HELPLINE Specialists answer calls 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. 2-1-1 specialists can identify weatherization programs.

 2-1-1


 www.unitedwayhouston.org/our-211-helpline/
(to email 211 or to search the directory online)


Harris (BakerRipley, formerly Neighborhood Centers)

 713-590-2327


 www.neighborhood-centers.org/locations/utility-assistance-program

Fort Bend (Combined Community Action)

 1-800-688-9065

 www.ccaction.com/community-action/weatherization-program

Montgomery and Waller (Brazos Valley Community Action Agency)

 979-774-1831

 www.bvcaa.org/programs/weatherization

Telephone Assistance Programs

There are several programs that help lower telephone bills.


Directory Assistance Cost Exemption

Programs may be available for people who, because of their disabilities, may not be able to use a traditional phone directory. These programs may waive charges for calling directory assistance (411) and for having a call connected through directory assistance. Contact the phone provider for availability and how to apply.

Lifeline is a government program that provides a discounted landline or cell phone (but not both) to qualified low-income families. Participating in certain benefits, such as Medicaid, SNAP, and SSI automatically qualify someone for lifeline. Households must recertify each year to stay in the program. Visit the website or contact a participating phone carrier for more information.


Link-Up is for residents of tribal lands, and it helps pay activation or installation fees. To receive Link-Up assistance, a person must also qualify for **Lifeline**, and assistance will be provided automatically. Contact a participating phone carrier for more information.


Lifeline Support has tools to let someone know whether they qualify for Lifeline and a list of participating providers.

 1-866-454-8387

 www.lifelinesupport.org

At **Texas Lifeline**, people can sign up for the program or request an application be mailed. It also has a list of documents needed to be approved. Individuals can also check their application status.

 1-866-454-8387

 www.texaslifeline.org

SECTION 21.2 ELECTRICITY PROVIDERS


In parts of Texas, residents can choose their electric provider. When choosing or switching providers, people should be informed about the choice they make. Rates vary from company to company, and sometimes better rates are available if there is a contract in place. Understand the company's plan and how it addresses fluctuating monthly prices and seasonal price increases. Is renewable energy important, or is fixed monthly bills a better option. Many providers offer special plans; when choosing a company, a person must take into account what will be the overall best deal and meet his or her needs.


Tips to Keeping the Lights On


- Pay bills on time. If someone cannot pay, he or she should contact the company before the bill is late to access the best options, such as bill extensions or deferred payment plans.
- Maintain a good utility credit history
- Consider the provider's "same price every month" option. For some people, this plan keeps prices stable, but others may experience a higher charge if the average for the year was miscalculated.
- Ask the electric provider about payment assistance programs.

CHOOSING AN ELECTRIC PROVIDER

Power to Choose is run by the Public Utility Commission of Texas. Electric providers list their information on the site, and consumers can compare plans and choose the one that best fits his or her needs. The website also has tips on how to choose the right plan.


 1-866-797-4839 (general questions)


 7-1-1 (TTY)

 www.powertochoose.org

Utility Company Complaints


The **Public Utility Commission of Texas** takes complaints about electric service and companies that do not honor the rates they post on the Power to Choose website. It also provides information about common utility questions, tips on choosing new service, and where to get financial help with utility bills.


 1-888-782-8477

 www.puc.texas.gov

(keyword: consumer, utility complaints)

The **Texas Office of Public Utility Council** has information on consumer rights with regard to utilities and also provides some representation to residential customers who have complaints against utility companies.

 1-877-839-0363

 www.opc.state.tx.su

Sprint: "Sprint Customer Care is prepared to work with federal government employees seeking short-term payment solutions." Government workers can call Sprint at 888-211-4727.

ATT: ATT said we're here to help ease the burden of trying to pay bills on time during the shutdown. As long as the shutdown is in effect, our customer service team will adjust late fees, provide extensions, and coordinate with you on revised payment schedules. 800.531.5000

T-Mobile: Government workers can call T-Mobile at 1-877-746-0909 to discuss short-term payment options, which could include spreading payment out over time or deferring payment

Verizon: Government workers can join Verizon's "Promise to Pay" program and set a future payment date. You can sign-up through the Verizon app or by calling, 1-866-266-1445