

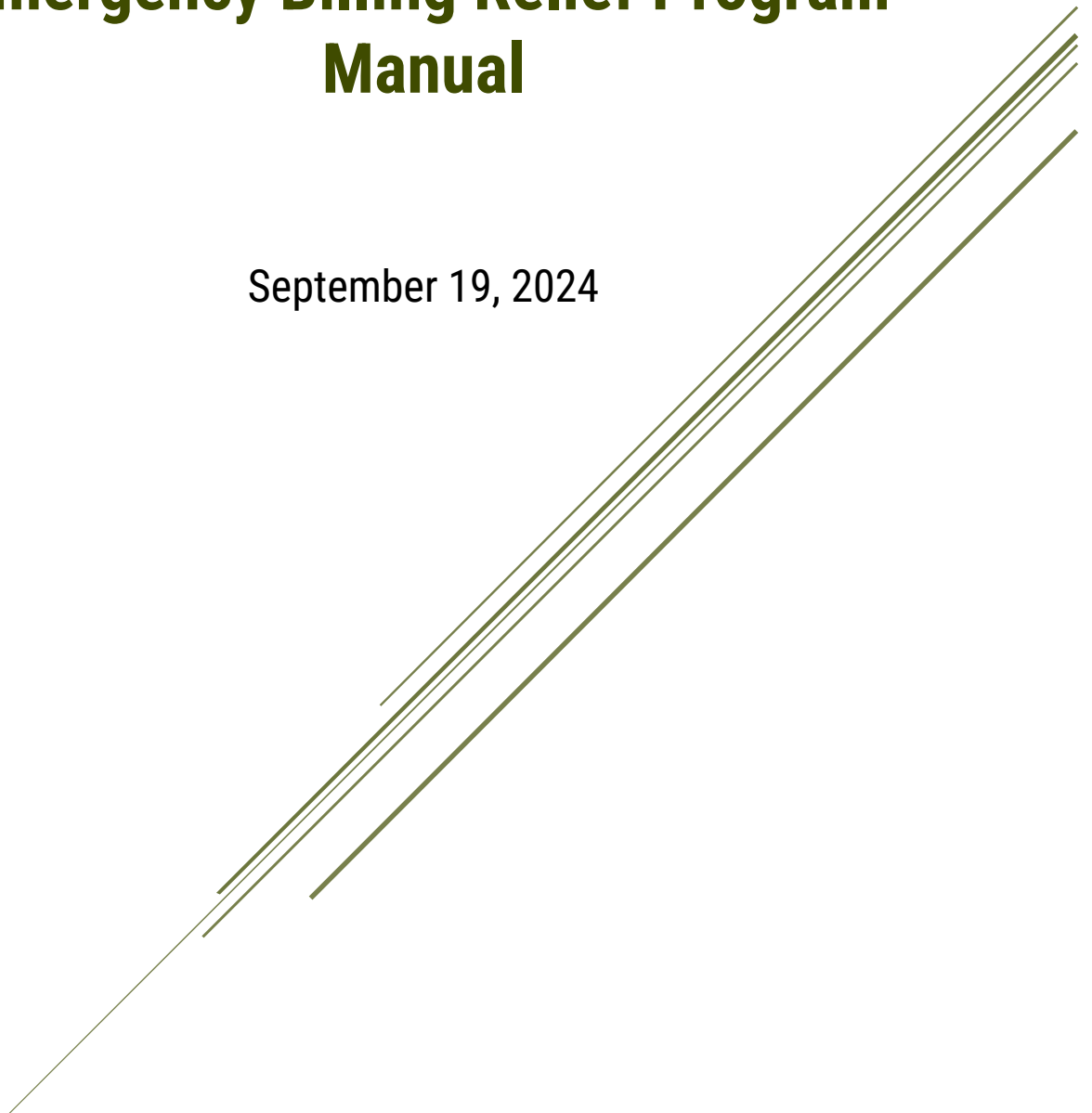


AUC

Alberta Utilities Commission

Emergency Billing Relief Program Manual

September 19, 2024



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1 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 such as 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 August 2023, the AUC issued an Emergency Billing Relief Program (EBRP) Manual that included a process for billing relief for evacuated customers. From February to March 2024, the AUC held written consultation on the 2023 EBRP and the possibility of formalizing the program. The AUC assessed the feedback that was received and thanks participants for their efforts in providing input. After sharing these insights with the government of Alberta, the AUC received direction from Minister Neudorf on August 16, 2024 to run a billing relief program for the 2024 season.

In consideration of the feedback received, the AUC has amended the 2023 program and sets out the details for the 2024 program in this manual.

2 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:

- (a) streetlights rates
- (b) flat metered rates
- (c) oilfield rates
- (d) transmission connected rates
- (e) sites associated with Standard Industrial Classification (commonly referred to as 'SIC') codes representing oilfield, mining, gas processing or other industrial classifications (if available)

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

For an event to qualify for billing relief due to a 2024 wildfire evacuation event under this program, the following criteria must be met:

- (1) Be a mandatory evacuation order as confirmed by AUC staff. AUC staff will provide data on evacuations upon request. Requests should be made to info@auc.ab.ca.
- (2) Be a mandatory evacuation order lasting more than 7 calendar days. The length of an evacuation order is inclusive of the first and final day of the order. For example, an evacuation order issued on May 13 and lifted on May 19 would be considered 7 days.
 - (a) 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.
 - (b) 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.
- (3) 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.

4 Process and responsibilities by party

4.1 DFOs

4.1.1 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:
 - (a) Site ID
 - (b) Retailer ID
 - (c) Retailer name
 - (d) Evacuation start date
 - (e) Evacuation end date (if known)
 - (f) Total number of days evacuated (if end date is known, otherwise status shown as ‘in progress’)

- (2) Consider training customer support staff on the details of the program in order to field incoming customer calls and questions.

4.1.2 During and at the end of an evacuation event

- (1) Monitoring and tracking of evacuation events:
 - (a) Monitor the [Active emergency updates website](#) for status of evacuation orders within their service area.
 - (b) Create, and update as needed, a list of sites impacted by 2024 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.
- (2) DFOs are to use best efforts to cross reference their recorded start and end dates of the mandatory evacuation orders for affected areas within their overlapping service areas.
- (3) 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.

4.1.2.1 Calculation and administration of billing relief

- (1) For eligible sites that experience an ongoing evacuation event:
 - (a) Upon the lifting of an evacuation event plus 96 hours, for each eligible site each DFO will: first issue a TBF with original charges, and within two business days, issue a TBF with an OTC credit at a rate of \$20 for every 7-day period that a customer was evacuated for. For example, a customer evacuated for 16 days would be considered to have been evacuated for two 7-day periods and would receive a credit of \$40.

4.1.3 Following an evacuation event

- (1) For 2024 wildfire events that occurred in advance of this procedures manual being issued, DFOs are to send a full list of impacted sites to the retailer of record as soon as possible. For each site, indicate:
 - (a) If 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 at a rate of

- \$20 for every 7-day period that a customer was evacuated for these sites as soon as possible and the retailer of record is to include that credit in their next billing cycle.
- (b) If site 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, 2024), 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.

4.2 Retailers

4.2.1 Before an evacuation event

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

4.2.2 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:
 - (a) Use the TBF with the billing-relief credit to create a customer bill for the billing period, including the billing-relief period and billing-relief credit.
 - (b) 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.
- (3) 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).
- (4) Issue the bill.
- (5) Do not issue any new de-energization requests or new de-enrollment requests for sites included in an evacuation list from a DFO.

4.2.3 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.

4.3 The AUC

4.3.1 Before an evacuation event

- (a) Coordinate communication efforts across industry and with the government of Alberta.
- (b) Provide FAQ to support DFO and retailer customer support teams.

4.3.2 During an evacuation event

- (a) Provide data on evacuees to DFOs on request.
- (b) Coordinate communication efforts and troubleshoot unforeseen challenges across industry and with the government of Alberta.