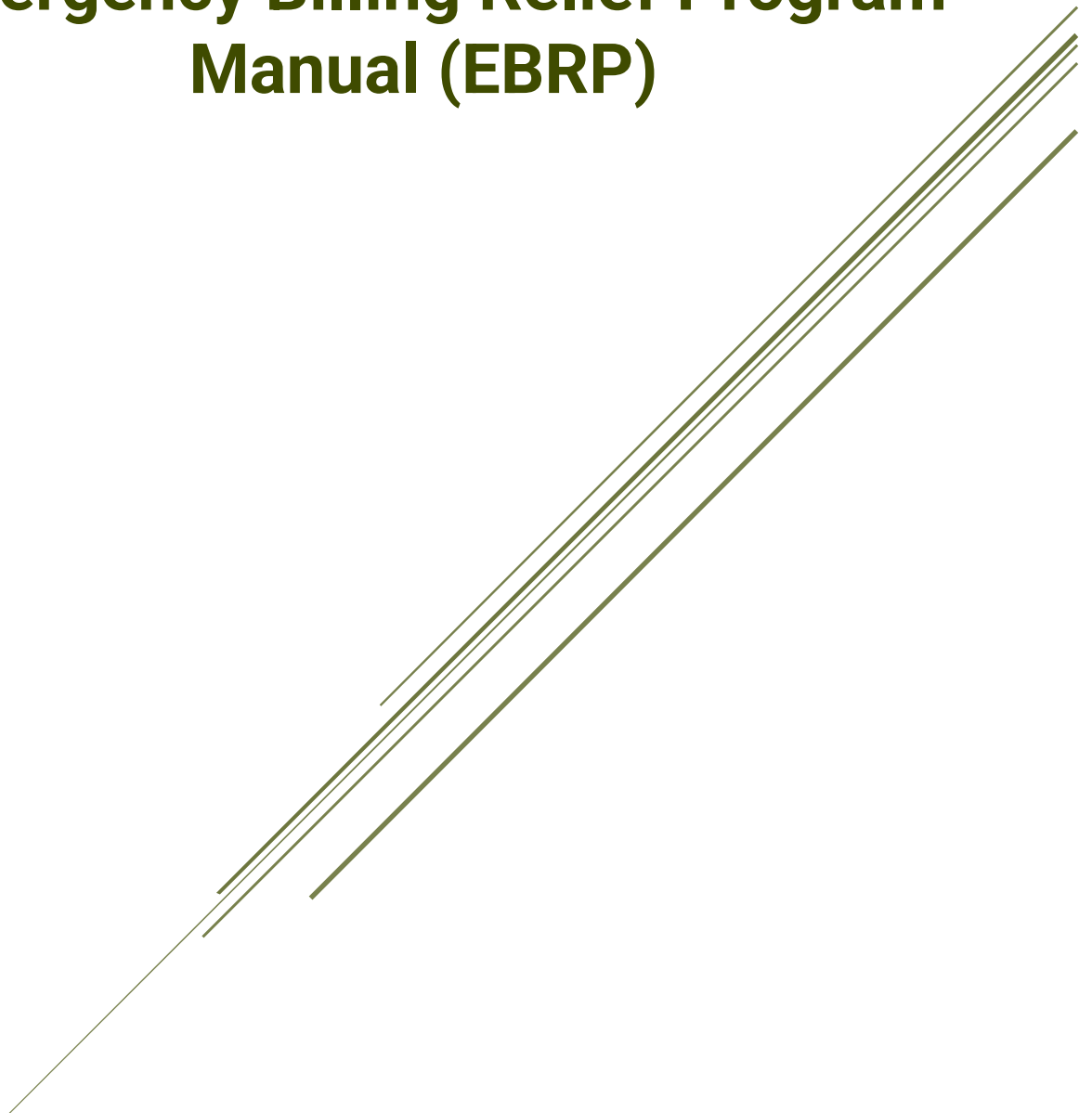




# AUC

Alberta Utilities Commission

## **Emergency Billing Relief Program Manual (EBRP)**



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## 1 Definitions

**Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC):** The regulatory body that ensures that the delivery of Alberta's utility service takes place in a manner that is fair, responsible and in the public interest. The AUC coordinates the Emergency Billing Relief Program (EBRP).

**Billing relief period:** This period includes the first and last day of the mandatory evacuation order and any subsequent mandatory evacuation orders issued within 96 hours of the previous order being lifted.

**Site (customer) eligibility:** Criteria used to determine which Alberta residential, farm, irrigation, and small commercial rate class sites (customers) qualify for the EBRP. Eligible sites (customers) must consume less than 250,000 kilowatt hours of electricity per year or less than 2,500 gigajoules of natural gas per year, based on the most recent 12 months of historical usage data.

**Distribution facility owner (DFO):** The entity responsible for providing electric or natural gas distribution service and implementing the EBRP for eligible sites within their service area.

**Emergency Billing Relief Program (EBRP):** A program initiated by the Government of Alberta and coordinated by the AUC to provide billing relief to sites (customers) affected by mandatory evacuation orders during wildfire season.

**Mandatory evacuation order:** An official directive requiring residents to leave a specified area due to an imminent threat, such as a wildfire. For the purposes of the EBRP, the mandatory evacuation order must remain in effect for a minimum of seven consecutive days to qualify for billing relief.

**One-time credit (OTC):** A credit applied to the utility bill of an eligible site (customer) for each seven-day period they were evacuated under a mandatory evacuation order. The credit rate is \$20 per service (natural gas and electricity).

**Tariff bill of filing (TBF):** A billing document issued by DFOs that includes accrued charges and one-time credits for eligible evacuated sites (customers).

## 2 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 areas of the province.

Beginning with the 2023 wildfire season, the AUC developed an Emergency Billing Relief Program (EBRP) as directed by the Government of Alberta to ensure customers receive financial relief during times of mandatory evacuations. This program has evolved over the years, and this updated manual describes how this program will operate for this current wildfire season.

## 3 Site (customer) eligibility

The goal of the EBRP is to assist individuals, couples, families and small independent businesses that are subject to mandatory evacuation orders of seven days or more. To balance this goal with administrative and practical considerations, owners of electric distribution systems and gas distribution systems (DFOs) will apply the following criteria to identify site (customer) eligibility.

This program applies to Alberta residential, farm, irrigation and small commercial rate class sites that consume less than 250,000 kilowatt hours of electricity per year and to Alberta 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 mandatory evacuation order). **However, sites (customers) within the following rate classes are not eligible for this program:**

- (a) Streetlight 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).

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

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

- (1) The mandatory evacuation order must be recorded on the [Alberta Emergency Alert](#) website. AUC staff will provide data on evacuations upon request.
- (2) The mandatory evacuation order must last for seven or more consecutive calendar days. The duration includes both the first and last day of the order. For example, a mandatory evacuation order issued on May 13 and lifted on May 19 would be considered a seven-day order.

- (a) If a site experiences multiple mandatory evacuation orders with less than 96 hours (four days) between them, the entire period from the date the first order was issued to the date the last order was lifted (inclusive) will be treated as one continuous evacuation period for billing relief.
- (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 the above criteria, and if eligible, presented as a separate and new billing relief period and associated billing relief credit to the site (customer).
- (3) Electric and natural gas distribution facility owners (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.

## **5 Process and responsibilities by party**

### **5.1 Distribution facility owners (DFOs)**

#### **5.1.1 At the start of a mandatory evacuation event**

- (1) Create a tracking form to document mandatory evacuation events impacting sites (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 to field incoming customer calls and questions.

#### **5.1.2 During and at the end of a mandatory evacuation event**

- (1) Monitoring and tracking of evacuation events:
  - (a) Monitor the [Alberta Emergency Alert](#) website for the status of evacuation orders within their service area.
  - (b) Create, and update as needed, a list of sites impacted by mandatory evacuation orders that fall within the program's site (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 4 of this manual are met and the billing relief period has ended, provide the applicable billing relief period within the tracking list.

- (2) 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 (customer) or evacuation status to the applicable retailer of record as soon as practicable.

#### **5.1.2.1 Calculation and administration of billing relief credits**

- (1) Following the day upon which a mandatory evacuation order is lifted plus an additional 96 hours, DFOs will issue a tariff bill of filing (TBF) with a one-time credit (OTC) of \$20 per service (natural gas and electricity) for every full seven-day period the site was under a mandatory evacuation order.

For example, if a site (customer) was evacuated for 16 days, it would be credited for two full seven-day periods, resulting in a \$40 credit for gas and a \$40 credit for electricity. If a site (customer) was evacuated for 11 days, it would be credited for one seven-day period, resulting in a \$20 credit for gas and a \$20 credit for electricity.

**No disconnections should occur due to credit and collection processes during mandatory evacuation orders for impacted sites (customers).**

#### **5.1.3 Following a mandatory evacuation event**

- (1) For wildfire mandatory evacuation events that occurred before this procedure manual was issued, DFOs shall send a full list of impacted sites (customers) to the retailer of record as soon as possible. For each site (customer), indicate:
  - (a) If the mandatory 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 relief credit as per Section 4 of this manual. DFOs shall send to the retailer a TBF showing the OTC at a rate of \$20 for every seven-day period that a site (customer) was evacuated as soon as possible, and the retailer of record is to include that credit in their next bill.
  - (b) If the site (customer) is subject to an ongoing mandatory evacuation order, treat as an ongoing evacuation event as per Section 5.1.2.1 of this manual.
- (2) Keep track of all billing-relief credits provided, associated calculations and associated evacuation orders.
- (3) DFOs can apply to the AUC to recover the billing credits provided to sites (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.

## 5.2 Retailers

### 5.2.1 Before a mandatory evacuation event

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

### 5.2.2 During and at the end of a mandatory evacuation event

- (1) Receive and store mandatory evacuation lists from the DFOs for which it is a retailer of record.
- (2) For sites (customers) identified in the mandatory 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, 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 relief credit.” Alternatively, clearly explain these one-time credits to their customers using their preferred communication method.
- (3) In anticipation of potential customer inquiries, 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-enrolment requests for sites included in a mandatory evacuation list from a DFO.**
- (6) No late fees or penalties should be applied during mandatory evacuation orders for impacted sites (customers).**

### 5.2.3 Following a mandatory 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, forego credit collection, de-energization or de-enrolment of outstanding amounts for impacted sites (customers).

## 5.3 The AUC

### 5.3.1 Before a mandatory evacuation event

- (a) Coordinate communication efforts regarding the EBRP across the industry and with the Government of Alberta.
- (b) Provide FAQs to support DFOs and retailer customer support teams.

### 5.3.2 During a mandatory evacuation event

- (a) Provide assistance in clarifying mandatory evacuation areas to DFOs on request.

- (b) Coordinate communication efforts and troubleshoot unforeseen challenges across industry and with the Government of Alberta.