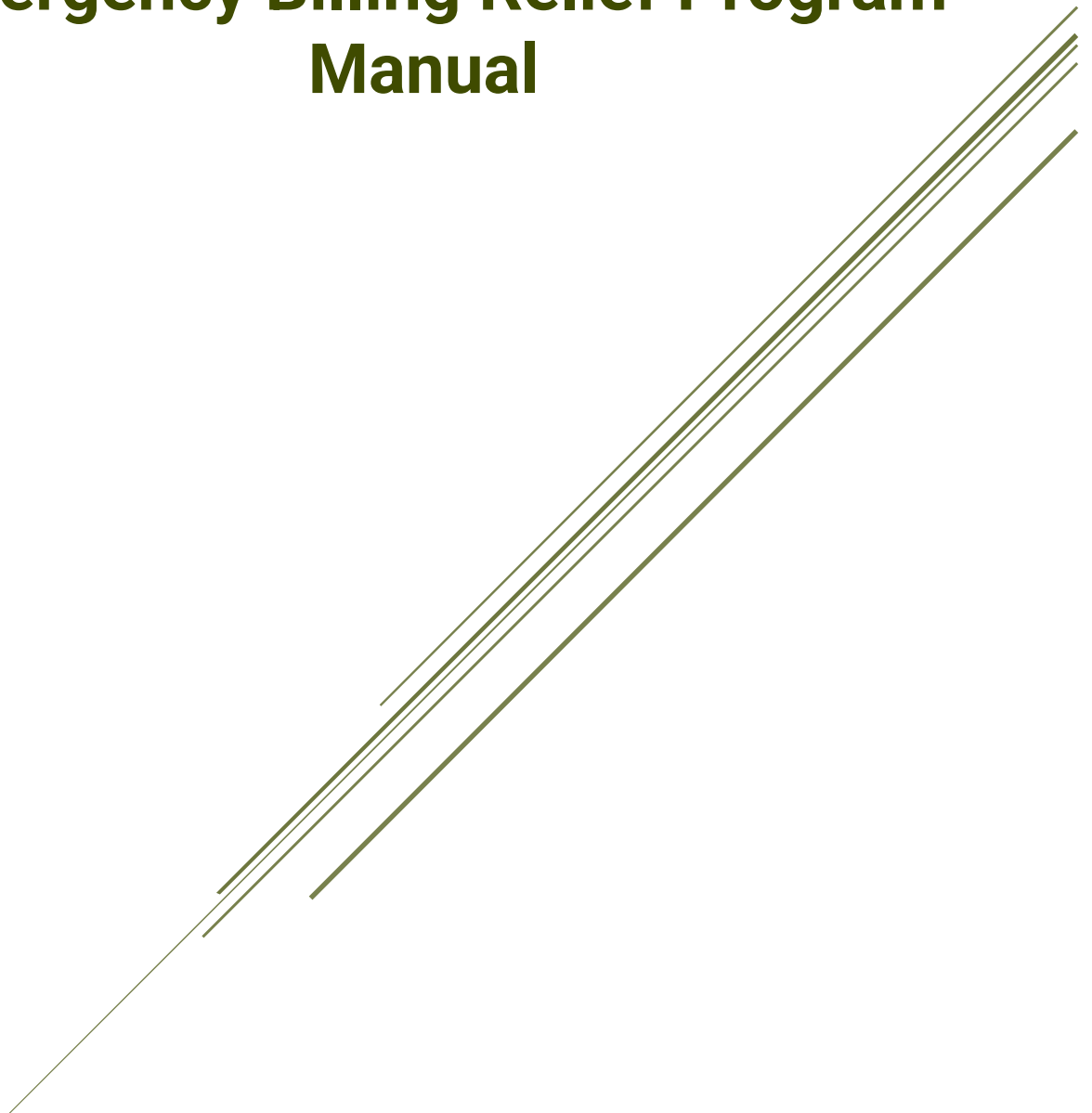




AUC

Alberta Utilities Commission

Emergency Billing Relief Program Manual



Contents

1 Definitions 1

2 Introduction 2

3 Customer (site) eligibility 2

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

5 Process and responsibilities by party 3

5.1 Distribution facility owners (DFOs)..... 3

5.1.1 At the start of a mandatory evacuation event 3

5.1.2 During and at the end of a mandatory evacuation event..... 4

5.1.2.1 Calculation and administration of billing relief 4

5.1.3 Following a mandatory evacuation event 4

5.2 Retailers 5

5.2.1 Before a mandatory evacuation event 5

5.2.2 During and at the end of a mandatory evacuation event..... 5

5.2.3 Following a mandatory evacuation event 5

5.3 The AUC..... 6

5.3.1 Before a mandatory evacuation event..... 6

5.3.2 During a mandatory evacuation event 6

1 Definitions

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

Billing relief period: The duration during which utility billing is suspended for eligible customers due to a mandatory evacuation order. This period includes the first and last day of the evacuation order and any subsequent mandatory evacuation orders issued within 96 hours of the previous order being lifted.

Customer (site) eligibility: Criteria used to determine which residential, farm, irrigation, and small commercial rate class sites qualify for the EBRP. Eligible sites 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 managing electric and natural gas distribution systems and implementing the EBRP for eligible sites within their service areas.

Emergency Billing Relief Program (EBRP): A program established by the AUC to provide billing relief to customers affected by mandatory evacuation orders during wildfire season.

Mandatory Evacuation Order: This is an official directive from the Government of Alberta, requiring residents to leave the area due to an imminent threat, such as a wildfire. For the purposes of the EBRP, the order must last seven consecutive days or more to qualify for billing relief.

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

Tariff of filing (TBF): A billing document issued by DFOs that includes original charges and, within two business days, a TBF with a one-time credit for eligible evacuated sites.

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 residents. In the past, during mandatory evacuations of communities such as Fort McMurray, Waterton Lakes and High Level, the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC) 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 evacuation period.

Beginning with the 2023 wildfire season, the AUC issued an Emergency Billing Relief Program (EBRP) Manual that included a process for billing relief for evacuated customers. Following that season, the AUC held written consultation with participants of the EBRP and explored the possibility of formalizing the program. The AUC assessed all 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 the Minister of Affordability and Utilities, to formalize the EBRP.

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

3 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).

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) 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 seven consecutive calendar days or more. 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 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) 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 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 [active emergency updates 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 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 4 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.

5.1.2.1 Calculation and administration of billing relief

- (1) For eligible sites that experience an ongoing mandatory evacuation event:
 - (a) Upon a mandatory evacuation order DFOs will suspend issuance of any new tariff bill of filing (TBF) for eligible sites.
 - (b) Following the end of the evacuation order, DFOs will resume billing and each eligible site will receive:
 - A TBF reflecting the original charges, and
 - A one-time credit (OTC) of \$20 per service (natural gas and electricity) for every full seven-day period the site was under evacuation.

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.

5.1.3 Following a mandatory evacuation event

- (1) For wildfire events that occurred in advance of this procedure 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:
 - (c) 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 credit as per Section 4 of this manual. DFOs are to send a TBF showing the OTC credit at a rate of \$20 for every seven-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.
- (d) If site 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) After the annual wildfire season typically ending on October 31, 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.

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 you are a retailer of record.
- (2) For sites 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, 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-enrolment requests for sites included in a mandatory evacuation list from a DFO.

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, retailers are encouraged to not pursue credit collection, de-energization or de-enrolment of outstanding amounts for impacted sites.

5.3 The AUC

5.3.1 Before a mandatory evacuation event

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