**Village of Yellow Springs**

**Utility Office Policies and Procedures**

**Effective 08/01/19**

\*\*Procedures associated with property owner responsibility of tenant utility bills shall not apply to accounts currently in the name of the tenant at a rental address until the tenant moves and is replaced by another tenant.  Otherwise, any new occupancy of a rental property after January 1, 2016 the property owner will be responsible for any utility bill associated with their property per Village Ordinance 1040.02.

**New Account Set Up**

1. Any new accounts must be set up in person at the Village Utilities Office or via email to utilitybilling@yso.com prior to the date of move in order to establish a clear start of service date and/or avoid disruption of services.
2. The applicant must provide the Village Utilities Office with the Utility Account Registration form, properly completed, as well as any other required documentation. If the property is a rental property, a copy of the lease agreement will be required. This form is available online at [yso.com](https://www.yso.com) and click on “Village Departments”, then click on “Utility Billing”, and finally click on “Forms and Applications” under the heading “More Information”.
3. Utility services at any property shall be placed in the name of the occupant unless the property is a rental unit and the property owner elects to keep the utility services in their name.
4. Owners of rental properties shall have the option of the account being placed in their name or the name of the tenant. If the account is put into the owner’s name, the bill will be sent to the owner. If the bill is placed in the tenant’s name, the bill will be sent to the tenant, unless the owner elects the bill to be sent to them directly.
5. In the instance of rental properties, residential or commercial, both the property owner and the tenant must supply pertinent information as determined by the Village of Yellow Springs.
6. No utility service shall be initiated at any property until such time as proper paperwork and documentation has been provided to the Village Utilities Office.

1. If services are disconnected at time of application, any outstanding balance associated with that property must be brought current before services are reconnected.
2. It is the responsibility of the applicant to bring any past due balances in their name current before utilities will be placed in their name. Landlords are welcome to verify if there are any past due balances in the name of a potential tenant. If a past due balance exists in the name of a person who is a renter, they must bring the account current prior to the utilities being put in their name.

**Payment Options and Fees**

The Village Utilities Office accepts a number of different forms of payment. We accept cash, checks, money orders, credit cards, and automatic debit from a checking or savings account. Fees will apply if paying by credit card/debit card. Also, if paying by check, over the phone, there is a processing fee. To pay by phone you can call 1-877-885-7968 anytime.

**Delinquency Procedures**

1. For the purposes of determining delinquency, if the utility bill is not paid in full upon the due date on the 15th of each month, the customer's account shall be classified as delinquent. Once they are classified as delinquent, they are assessed a 5% penalty. There will be no extensions granted.
2. Once the following month’s bill is issued, customers will be notified of any past due balance on their bill.
3. If a customer has not paid their bill by the time the next month’s bill becomes due, they are notified by letter of potential disconnection if the past due balance on the account is not paid by the date indicated on the letter. If the property is a rental property, the property owner will also receive a copy of the disconnection letter.  There will be no extensions granted.
4. After the passage of seven days from the date of the letter, if the account remains delinquent and no payment plan has been executed, the designated workers of the Village may enter the premises where such utility service is being provided, between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., and disconnect any and all meters, conduits or attachments from the mains, pipes or lines of the Village. If utility services are disconnected at any address, service shall not be reinstated for any utility until the full balance of the account attached to said address has been paid in full.
5. Once services have been disconnected, or if a tenant moves and leaves an outstanding balance, an attempt to collect the full amount due plus penalties will be made by the Village. Any correspondence in an attempt to collect an unpaid bill will be sent to the landlord as well, if applicable.  At that point the tenant/homeowner/landlord will have an opportunity to pay the balance no less than 30 days after the due date of the final bill. If the account is not brought current after 30 days passed the bill due date, any outstanding balance, including any penalties, will be assessed to the property taxes along with an applicable assessment fee through the process prescribed by the Greene County Auditor.
6. Delinquent amounts incurred by tenants prior to the implementation of this policy shall stay with the tenant and shall not be considered attached to the property for the purposes of this policy.

**Utility Disputes**

If you are disputing your current meter reads, a courtesy re-read will be offered once a month. Any additional customer requests for re-reads incur an additional charge per work order created.

Inquiries or complaints regarding a specific utility bill must be made prior to the due date. Utility bill complaints are filed with the Village Utilities Office.  Complaints may be filed via mail, in person, or via email to utilitybilling@yso.com. Any pertinent documentation should be presented at that time. Bills in dispute are still subject to penalty and/or disconnection for non-payment.

Minor complaints will be handled within the Village Utilities Office. More complex issues will be referred to the Finance Director who will determine if the issue will require a decision by the Utility Dispute Resolution Board.

**Access to Meters**

A number of meters within the Village are located inside residences or buildings and not accessible by Village staff. Per Village Ordinance 1040.11, customers shall allow Village staff access to Village equipment, including meters, at intervals not to exceed 90 days. This policy is in place in order to ensure that the equipment is functioning properly and collecting accurate readings. Gaining access to meters and acquiring reads also alerts Village staff to any water leaks or other issues that could affect a customer’s bill.

If the meter reader is unable to gain access at the time your reading is due, a customer card will be left in a conspicuous location at the property. In order to collect a read, the customer is expected to fill out the card immediately and return it to the Village Utilities Office via postage paid mail or in person. It should be noted that the customer card does not substitute the meter reader gaining access.

If Village staff has not accessed a customer’s meter in over 90 days, they will receive a letter notifying them of such and requesting the customer set up a time to have their meter read.

Although it is Village policy to read water meters every 90 days, we encourage customers to monitor their meters monthly in order to detect any potential leaks in a timely manner.

**Sewer Adjustments**

In the event of a leak or other unforeseen situation, a customer may request a sewer adjustment for water that did not enter the Village sewer system. Customers may fill out a Sewer Utility Bill Adjustment Request form. The customer will describe the problem and attach any supporting documentation for review by the Public Works staff. If the water used as a result of the problem was found not to have entered the Village sewer system, an adjustment to the sewer charges will be granted and credited to the customer’s account.

During the summer months, a Summer Sewer Adjustment form can be completed for customers who use water for gardening purposes during the months of June, July and August. This form is completed and submitted to the Village Utilities Office. Water consumption during non-summer months is compared to the summer water usage.  Any usage in excess of the normal consumption (up to a 6,000-gallon maximum) during non-summer months will be adjusted off of the customer’s sewer and reflected their next normal water and sewer billing cycle after the month of August.

Any customer who wishes to receive a sewer credit for swimming pool fills must apply at the utility office prior to the fill. Village utility staff will take a meter reading prior to the fill, and again no later than 48 hours after the fill. A credit will then be issued on the sewer portion only of your next bill. No credit will be given on pool fills without the Village obtaining meter reads before and after the fill (within 48 hours).

**Level Billing**

The Village offers customers the option to enter into a level billing agreement for their utility bills. Customers may sign up for level billing at the Village Utilities Office during normal business hours. The Utilities Office will determine the customer’s monthly average based on the past twelve months’ worth of bills.  This average will be the basis for the customer’s level billing amount to be billed evenly over each month. You may choose to raise the level billing amount paid each month but you cannot lower it.

**If you fail to make your monthly payment or only make a partial payment the account will automatically be removed from level billing and cannot be placed back on. If you are removed from level billing for missing a payment, any balance accrued will be due immediately. You may request to sign back up for level billing the following March if you wish.**

In February, the account is reconciled and any amount over or under the actual billing that the customer has paid will be applied to the bill due for March and their level billing balance will be set to zero. Your level billing amount may be adjusted at this time as well to ensure you are paying your adjusted average.

The Utilities Office will check level billing accounts every six months to verify that they are paying the appropriate amounts in case their averages have changed over the course of the year. If the staff finds that the level billing amount needs to be adjusted, the customer will be notified and their account updated.

**Payment Agreements**

The Village understands that customers may face undue hardships and may require special arrangements to bring their account current. Customers must complete a “Request for Payment Agreement” form and submit it along with a written request outlining their hardship and submit to the Village Utilities Office to apply for a payment agreement. If granted, a signed payment agreement must be arranged before any impending disconnection date. The balance on the agreement will be evenly distributed over a mutually agreed upon time frame not to exceed six months unless otherwise approved by the Finance Director. This agreed upon amount will be expected to be paid along with the current month’s bill.  The customer will receive their monthly bill showing their payment agreement balance and the amount due. The amount due includes the current bill total as well as the agreed upon amount in your payment agreement.

It is the policy of the utility office not to add any additional penalties once a payment agreement is entered into.

Should a customer default on their payment agreement, a notice of disconnection will be hand delivered to the customer. If payment is not made within 48 hours, the utility service will be disconnected. Village staff will check for all payments received by 4:30pm on the day prior to shut-offs. If no payment has been received and your name appears on the disconnection list, a $35 disconnection fee will be applied to the account and must be paid prior to reconnection.

 In order to reinstate utilities, the account must be brought current.  The only methods of payment accepted at this time will be cash, money order or credit card. No personal checks will be accepted. Once a customer defaults on a payment agreement, they will not be granted another payment agreement for at least one year.

It is our policy that customers will only allowed to enter into one payment agreement per year.

Payment agreements can be declined for tenants if the property owner so desires.

**Disconnection of Utilities**

The Village Utilities Office follows the procedures for disconnection outlined in Ordinance 1040.04. The Village disconnects utilities on two different dates each month. The first date of disconnection affects those that have defaulted on their payment agreement which occurs 48 hours after the bill due date. The second disconnection date affects those who are 30 days past due. The Utility Billing Clerks shall check all payment drop boxes, online payments, and telephone payments by 4:30pm on the day prior to disconnection. Anyone who has not paid shall be placed on the disconnection list and assessed a $35 disconnection list fee. The disconnection list fee is due whether the customer was actually disconnected or not.

 **Life Saving Equipment Provision**

We recognize that some customers require use of life saving equipment that utilizes electricity and that disconnection of electric service could prevent that equipment from operating. If you have a health condition that requires use of an electric utilizing life saving device including but not limited to oxygen, respirator, nebulizer or other related item, you must supply a letter from your physician. The letter must state your name and the type of life saving equipment item that you currently use. This letter will remain noted in your account for six months. After the passage of six months, the letter will no longer be considered valid unless a new letter is provided to us. We will also share this information with the Police Department in the event that there is a power outage in the Village so that our Electric Department will be made aware and every effort can be made to restore power to your residence as soon as possible.If a customer should be set to be disconnected for non-payment of service and the customer has provided documentation of utilizing lifesaving equipment, the Utilities Department will reserve the right to disconnect the customer's water service. If the water service is unable to be disconnected for any reason, the Village reserves the right to install a limiter meter. A limiter meter will limit the amount of electricity to be used to only supply certain items which would allow the customer to operate their life saving equipment.

**Reconnection of Service**

Once the balance is paid, service will be restored the same business day if paid between the hours of 8:00 am and 3:30 pm Monday through Friday. If payment is received outside of regular business hours, service will be restored the following business day.

**Bad Checks/NSF Checks**

Once the Village Utilities Office is notified from the bank of a returned check for a utility payment, a staff member will look up the account which the payment was applied to determine which utilities were paid from the returned payment. There is also a $35 returned check fee. Once the adjustment form has been completed, the Finance Director will sign the form and the Utilities staff member will adjust the charges back on to the customer’s account along with the NSF fee.  The customer will then be notified by letter of the returned check and the account being adjusted to reflect the non-payment.

If the customer was an ACH (automatic check withdrawal) customer, they could be removed from future ACH payments for a period of six months. If the customer paid via written check, we reserve the right to not accept checks from the customer for a period of six months as well. IF MORE THAN 2 BAD CHECKS ARE RECEIVED, WE WILL NO LONGER ACCEPT CHECKS AS A FORM OF PAYMENT. These terms will be outlined in the letter that the customer receives and our billing system will also have this information entered in.

**Change of Mailing Address**

If a customer changes their mailing address, it is the responsibility of the customer to notify the Village Utilities Office via phone or in writing as soon as possible. Failure to receive a Village utility bill DOES NOT excuse payment and/or penalty.

**Discontinuation of Utility Services**

If a customer will be moving from their current address, they will be required to notify the Village Utilities Office within 24 hours of the move to have a work order placed for a final meter reading by Village staff.  Once the work order is placed, Village staff will read any meters associated with the address during the normal Village business hours (8am – 4:30pm Monday through Friday) within 24 hours of the request. This final read will be used to calculate the customer’s final bill. A forwarding address will be required in order for the final bill to be sent to the correct address. If an application for the next tenant for said address is not received by the time the final read is complete, it is the Village's practice to disconnect the electric service until the new tenant's application and supporting documents are received.