

POLICY GOVERNING DISCONTINUATION OF RESIDENTIAL WATER SERVICE FOR NONPAYMENT

1.0 General Policy and Authorization

1.1 Governing Authority

The Serrano Water District, as an agency of the state, formed as a special district pursuant to the Irrigation District Law, Water Code Section 20500 et seq. ("District") is governed in the execution of the collection of delinquent accounts by California Government Code Sections 60370–60375.5. As an urban or community water system that supplies water to more than 200 service connections, the District is also governed, effective February 1, 2020, by Sections 116900 – 116926 of the California Health & Safety Code, which is known as the Water Shutoff Protection Act or SB 998.

1.2 Discontinuation Policy

The Serrano Water District Discontinuation of Residential Water Service for Nonpayment Policy ("Policy") establishes policies and procedures when a water bill becomes delinquent. Discontinuance of water service for nonpayment is considered the final phase of the collection procedure and will be instituted only after both sufficient notification and all other reasonable payment alternatives required by SB 998 have been exhausted. To the extent this Policy conflicts with any other District rules, regulations, or policies, this Policy shall control, and the District Board has incorporated this Policy by reference into the District's Rules and Regulations for Water Service (as amended by the District Board on April 21, 2020).

1.3 General Manager Authority

By adoption of this Policy, the Board is authorizing the General Manager and their designee(s) to exercise certain duties and responsibilities under this Policy that are essential for the operation of the District.

1.4 Contact Information

For questions or assistance regarding your water bill, including options to avoid discontinuation of service for nonpayment, the District's Customer Service staff can be reached at 714-538-0079. Customers may also visit the District's Customer Service desk in person Monday through Thursday, from 7:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and Friday's, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., except on District holidays or where office closures are ordered per state or federal law.

2.0 Discontinuation of Service for Nonpayment on Delinquent Accounts

2.1 Delinquent Accounts

Delinquent accounts are any water service bill that remains unpaid by the due date indicated on the bill. This Policy applies to the collection of delinquent accounts.

2.2 Time Period to Discontinue Service

The District is authorized to discontinue water service for water bills that are delinquent for at least sixty (60) days.

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3.0 Notices to Customer

3.1 Written Notice to Customer or Occupant/Water Consumer at Service Address

The District will provide a mailed notice to the customer of record by 3:00 p.m. on the 27th day after the billing date (but no less than thirty (30) days before discontinuation of water service). A ten percent (10%) late fee may be assessed at that time. If the customer's address is not the address of the property to which residential service is provided, the District will also send notice to the address of the property of which residential service is provided and will be addressed to "Occupant/Water Consumer".

3.1.1 The mailed notice required in Section 3.1 above will contain:

- 3.1.1.1** the name and address of the customer on record;
- 3.1.1.2** the amount of the delinquency;
- 3.1.1.3** the date by which payment or payment arrangements must be made to avoid discontinuance of service;
- 3.1.1.4** the procedure by which the customer may request an extension or alternative payment arrangement described in Section 4;
- 3.1.1.5** the procedure by which the customer may contest a water bill and appeal as described in Section 12;
- 3.1.1.6** information regarding the availability of financial assistance, including private, local, state, or federal sources, if applicable; and
- 3.1.1.7** the telephone number where the customer may request a delayed payment arrangement, to include a possible amortization plan, or receive additional information from the District.
- 3.1.1.8** a web link to this Policy

3.2 Telephonic Notice

If the mailed notice is returned through the mail as undeliverable or the customer has not paid their delinquent account at least ten (10) days before discontinuation of service. The District will also make a reasonable, good faith effort to contact the customer of record, or an adult person living at the premises of the customer, by telephone. The District will offer to provide in writing a copy of this Policy and to discuss options to avert discontinuation of water service for nonpayment, including the possibility of an extension or other payment arrangement listed in Section 4 below.

3.3 Posting of Notice to Occupants at Service Address

If the District is unable to make contact with the customer or an adult person living at the service address by written notice and by telephone, the District will make a good faith effort to visit the residence and leave a notice of imminent discontinuation of residential water service (e.g. a door tag) and both a phone number and link to this Policy in a conspicuous place at the service address. The notice and both phone number and link to this Policy will be left at the residence at least 48 hours before discontinuation of service. The posted notice (e.g. door tag) will contain the same notice information required above in Section 3.1.1. A Fifteen dollar (\$15.00) door tag fee will be assessed at that time.

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4.0 Extensions and Other Alternative Payment Arrangements

4.1 Time to Request an Extension or Other Alternative Payment Arrangement

If a customer is unable to pay a bill during the payment period, the customer may request an extension or other alternative payment arrangement described in this Section 4. If a customer makes a request prior to discontinuation of service by the District, the request will be reviewed by the General Manager or designee. District decisions regarding extensions and other alternative payment arrangements are final and not appealable to the District Board of Directors under Section 12.

4.2 Extension

If approved by the District, a customer's payment of their unpaid balance may be temporarily extended. Such extension may not be provided more than 3 times during a 12 month time period. The General Manager or designee shall determine, in their discretion, whether to provide an extension, and how long an extension shall be provided to the customer. The customer shall pay the full unpaid balance by the date set by the District and must remain current on all water service charges accruing during any subsequent billing periods. The extended payment will be set forth in writing and provided to the customer.

4.3 Amortization

As determined by the General Manager or designee in their discretion, a customer's payment of their unpaid balance may be amortized over a period of months not to exceed six (6) months. If amortization is approved, the unpaid balance will be divided by the number of approved months in the amortization period, and that amount will be added to the customer's subsequent monthly bills for water service until fully paid. During the amortization period, the customer must remain current on all water service charges accruing during any subsequent billing periods. The amortization schedule and amounts due will be set forth in writing and provided to the customer.

4.4 Alternative Payment Schedule

As determined by the General Manager or designee in their discretion, a customer may pay their unpaid balance pursuant to an alternative payment schedule that will not exceed six (6) months. If approved, the alternative payment schedule may allow periodic lump-sum payments that do not coincide with the District's established payment date or may provide for payments made more or less frequently than the District's regular payment date. During the period of the alternative payment schedule, the customer must remain current on all water service charges accruing during any subsequent billing periods. The alternative payment schedule and amounts due will be set forth in writing and provided to the customer.

4.5 Failure to Comply

If a customer has been granted a payment arrangement under this Section 4 and (a) the original bill amount is delinquent by at least sixty (60) days and (b) the customer fails to: (i) pay the unpaid charges by the extension date; (ii) pay an amount due under an amortization schedule; or (iii) pay an amount due under an alternative payment schedule by its due date, then the District may discontinue water service and customer forfeits the right to any payment arrangement under this section for 6 months from the date that payment under an extension or alternative payment schedule was due. Customers may appeal this forfeited right to the General Manager or designee, who in their sole discretion may reinstate that right. The District will post a final notice of intent to discontinue service in a prominent and conspicuous location at the service address at least 48 hours before discontinuation of service. The final notice will not entitle the customer to any investigation or review by the District under Section 12.

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5.0 Reconnection of Service

5.1 Reconnection Requirements

Customers whose water service has been discontinued may contact the District regarding requirements to reconnect.

5.2 Reconnection Fees

Reconnection will be subject to (a) payment of a reconnection fee of \$50, (b) the amount of the delinquent account, including applicable interest or penalties, and (c) a security deposit, if required by the District. All payments must be made by cash, check, or certified funds. Requests to reconnect after 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, or any time on Saturday through Sunday, or holidays will be charged an after-hours reconnection fee of \$75 and any applicable fees listed as (a)-(c) in the paragraph. The District will reconnect service as soon as practicable but, at a minimum, will restore service before the end of the next regular working day following payment of any past due amount and delinquent fees attributable to the termination of service. Water service that is turned on by any person other than District personnel or without District authorization will be subject to fines, and possible additional charges or fees as well as possible referral to law enforcement personnel.

6.0 When Service Will Not Be Discontinued

6.1 General

The District will not discontinue water service for delinquent accounts (a) on a Saturday, Sunday, legal holiday, or at any time during which the District's office is not open to the public; (b) during the District's investigation of a timely customer complaint or request for investigation, or appeal of the District's decision, under Section 12; or (c) during a District review of, or time period for, an approved extension, amortization, or alternative payment arrangement under Section 4, if the customer remains in compliance with one of those payment arrangements.

6.2 Special Medical and Financial Circumstance with Alternative Payment Arrangement Agreement

In addition to Section 6.1, the District will not discontinue water service if all of the following are met:

- 6.2.1** The customer, or a tenant of the customer, submits to the District the certification of a licensed primary care provider that discontinuation of water service will be life threatening to, or pose a serious threat to the health and safety of, a resident of the premises where residential service is provided;
- 6.2.2** The customer demonstrates, as described below under Section 6.3, that they are financially unable to pay for residential service within the District's normal billing cycle. The customer is deemed financially unable to pay during the normal billing cycle if: (a) any member of the customer's household is a current recipient of CalWORKs, CalFresh, general assistance, Medi-Cal, California SSI/SSP, or California Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, or (b) the customer declares under penalty of perjury that the household's annual income is less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level; and
- 6.2.3** The customer is willing to enter into a written agreement with the District regarding an extension or other alternative payment arrangement under Section 4 above for the delinquent charges. The District will select terms and conditions of the payment plan that

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will be set forth in a written agreement.

6.3 Customer Demonstration, and District Review, or Qualifications

The customer is responsible for demonstrating that the qualifications in section 6.2 above have been met. Upon receipt of documentation from the customer, the District will review the documentation within seven (7) days and either: (a) notify the customer of the terms and conditions selected by the District and require the customer's signature on the payment plan agreement; (b) request additional information from the customer; or (c) notify the customer that they do not meet the qualifications.

6.4 Failure to Comply

The District may discontinue water service if a customer, who has been granted an alternative payment arrangement under this section 6, (a) is delinquent for sixty (60) days or more and (b) fails to do either of the following : (i) pay any amount due under the payment plan; or (ii) pay their current charges for water service. The District will post a final notice of intent to discontinue service in a prominent and conspicuous location at the service address at least five (5) business days before discontinuation of service. The final notice will not entitle the customer to any investigation or review by the District under Section 12.

7.0 Specific Program for Low Income Customers

7.1 Fee Waiver and Reconnection Fees

For residential customers who demonstrate household income below 200 percent (200%) of the federal poverty level, the District will:

7.1.1 Upon request by the customers, waive interest charges or penalties on delinquent bills once every 12 months.

7.1.2 Limit a reconnection of service fee during normal operating hours at an amount not to exceed fifty dollars (\$50) and during nonoperational hours at an amount not to exceed one hundred fifty dollars (\$150), but neither reconnection fee is to exceed the actual cost of reconnection if it is less. Both reconnection fees shall be subject to an annual adjustment for changes in the Consumer Price Index beginning January 1, 2021.

7.2 How to Qualify as a Low Income Customer

The customer is deemed to have an income below 200 percent (200%) of the federal poverty level if: (a) any member of the customer's household is a current recipient of CalWORKS, CalFresh, general assistance, Medi-Cal, California SSI/SSP, or California Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Woman, Infant, and Children, or (b) the customer declares under penalty of perjury that the household's annual income is less than 200 percent (200%) of the federal poverty level.

8.0 Procedures for Occupants or Tenants to Become Customers of the District

8.1 Applicability

This section only applies when a property owner, landlord, manager, or operator of a residential service address is listed as the customer of record and has been issued a notice of intent to discontinue water service under Section 3.

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8.2 Agreement to District Terms and Conditions of Service

The District shall make good faith effort to inform the residential occupants, by means of written notice, or telephonic communication, when the account is in arrears that service will be terminated at least 10 days prior to the termination. The written notice shall indicate the District will make service available to the actual residential occupants if occupant agrees to both the District's terms and conditions of service and the District's Rules and Regulations for Water Service, which are available at <http://www.serranowater.org> or upon request.

8.2.1 If one or more of the occupants are willing and able to assume responsibility for the subsequent non-delinquent charges to the account to the satisfaction of the District, the District will make service available to those occupants who have met those requirements.

8.3 Verification of Tenancy

In order for the occupant not to be responsible for the amount due on the delinquent account, an occupant who becomes a customer will verify that the delinquent account customer of record is or was the landlord, manager, or agent of the dwelling, not the current occupant. Verification may include, but is not limited to, a lease or rental agreement, rent receipts, a government document indicating that the occupant is renting the property, or information disclosed pursuant to Section 1962 of the Civil Code [at the discretion of the District].

8.4 Deduction from Rental Payments

Pursuant to Government Code Sections 60371(d) and 116916(e), any occupant who becomes a customer of the District pursuant to this Section 8 and whose periodic payments, such as rental payments, include charges for residential water service, where those charges are not separately stated, may deduct from the periodic rental payment each payment period all reasonable charges paid to the District for those services during the preceding payment period. The District has no authority to enforce Section 60371(d) or 116916(e) and any such decision by the occupant to deduct charges is made by the occupant and not authorized by the District.

9.0 Other Remedies

9.1 In addition to discontinuance of water service, the District may pursue any other remedies available in law or equity for nonpayment of water service charges, including, but not limited to: (a) securing delinquent amounts by filing liens on real property, (b) filing a claim or legal action, or (c) referring the unpaid amount to collections. In the event a legal action is decided in favor of the District, the District will be entitled to the payment of all costs and expenses, including attorneys' fees and accumulated fees.

10.0 Discontinuation of Water Service for Other Customer Violations

10.1 The District reserves the right to discontinue water service, without observing the timeframes established in the Policy for any violations of District ordinances, rules, or regulations other than for nonpayment of a Delinquent Account by a residential customer. Moreover, the limitations on discontinuation of water service described in the Policy shall only apply to discontinuation of residential water service as that term is defined in Health and Safety Code § 116902(c).

11.0 Fees and Charges Incurred

11.1 Except as otherwise expressly stated in this Policy, any fees and charges incurred by a customer under any other District rules, regulations, or policies will be due and payable as established in said rules, regulations, and policies.

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12.0 Procedures to Contest and Appeal a Water Bill

12.1 Time to Initiate a Complaint or Request an Investigation

Any customer may initiate a written complaint to, or request an investigation by, the General Manager into the charges on their bill within twenty-seven (27) days of the "bill date" on the contested bill. The District may, in its discretion, review untimely complaints or requests for investigations; however, such untimely complaints or requests are not appealable to the District Board of Directors.

12.2 Review by District

Upon receipt of written complaint or request, the General Manager or designee shall review the complaint and/or conduct an investigation determined to be appropriate in the General Manager's sole discretion. The General Manager's review will include consideration of whether the customer may receive an extension or alternative payment schedule under Section 4. During the review and/or investigation, the customer will be provided an extension from its noted due date in order to avoid late fees, but the customer will not be provided an extension of the 60-day time period provided under Section 2.3. The investigation shall be completed within 10 days from receipt of the written complaint or request, where the customer shall be notified of the General Manager's decision.

12.3 Outcomes of Decision

If the review and/or investigation results in favor of the customer, where the billing is incorrect, an adjustment shall be applied to the customer account. If the billing is correct, the bill balance shall be due ten (10) days from the customer being notified of the General Manager's decision. If before completion of the investigation, additional bill(s) become due, the customer is required to make payment of the entire amount due by the specified due date. Failure to do so may result in assessed late fees or discontinuation of service, due to nonpayment, in accordance with this Policy.

12.4 Appeal to Board of Directors

Any customer, whose timely complaint or request for an investigation under this Section 12 resulted in a decision unsatisfactory to the customer, may appeal the decision to the District Board of Directors by filing a written notice of appeal with the District Secretary at info@serranowater.org within the ten (10) days of receipt of the District's determination. Upon receiving the notice of appeal, the District Secretary will set the matter to be heard at an upcoming Board meeting and mail the customer written notice of the time and place of the hearing at least seven (7) days before the meeting. The decision of the Board is final. No discontinuation of water service for non-payment shall occur while the appeal is pending.

13.0 Publication on the District Website

13.1 This Policy is available on the District's website at <http://www.serranowater.org>.