



BLACK HILLS AREA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

COVID-19 UTILITY RESPONSE FOR RAPID CITY

3/25/20

BLACK HILLS ENERGY

Black Hills Energy's number one priority is our customers, employees and communities. We are actively monitoring the coronavirus (COVID-19) situation and have measures in place to ensure we continue to serve our customers in a way that is safe for both customers and our employees.

To support our customers who may be impacted by the nation's response to COVID-19:

- Black Hills Energy is temporarily suspending nonpayment disconnections for our customers.
- We realize that due to possible extended periods of isolation, customers may face financial hardships affecting their ability to timely pay their energy bills. We offer various assistance options to our customers such as, payment arrangements, [budget billing](#) and medical extensions.
- Visit www.blackhillsenergy.com for more information about these programs.
- Additionally, [211](#) is a service that connects millions of people to help with essential needs. Customers can also call our customer care specialists anytime at [1-888-890-5554](tel:1-888-890-5554).

WEST RIVER ELECTRIC

West River Electric Association will close to the public. WREA is following the CDC's recommended social distancing measures; this helps those with increased risk who are infected, but also those who need other critical health care services. We have decided to isolate the employees to ensure they can perform their job duties. An ineffective workforce would have detrimental effects on an already unfortunate pandemic.

In conclusion, hopefully, you understand the importance of temporarily closing to the public. Isolation and protecting mission-critical employees is the first step in our disaster management plan.

- Moving forward, we will monitor the condition day by day and hour by hour.
- Moreover, communication is key. Connect with us on Smarthub, social media, our website westriver.coop, and our phones are answered 24/7 by calling 605-279-2135 or 605-393-1500.

- Lastly, WREA will work with individuals experiencing financial hardships as a result of the coronavirus.

MONTANA-DAKOTA UTILITIES

We know our customers look to us to provide safe and reliable natural gas and electric service, which requires employees being available 24/7 to fulfill critical roles and emergency response. We also know some of our business and residential customers might have trouble paying their bills because of coronavirus related hardships. In that regard, Montana-Dakota has taken measurable actions to help our customers:

- We will not be disconnecting customers for nonpayment during this time.
- We have filed requests with our regulatory commissions for a waiver that allows the company to waive late fees.
- And, as always, we will work with customers on payment plan options.

VAST

Beginning Monday, March 23 we will be closing our stores to walk-in traffic temporarily, until further notice. We want to assure you we are open for business and our team is ready to assist you by phone, chat, email or social media. The health and well-being of our customers, employees and communities is of the highest importance to us. We understand the concern and uncertainty you may be experiencing due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

We certainly understand our customers' concerns and stress in this challenging time, and we understand that connectivity is of utmost importance. Therefore, beginning March 16 the following measures are in effect to support our communities for the next 60 days:

- Vast opened all Wi-Fi hot spots to customers and non-customers free of charge. A list of locations can be found at vastbroadband.com/hotspots.
- Vast will partner with school districts to ensure students in need of connectivity for remote learning with limited resources can still have internet.
- We continue to offer our low-income internet programs to those that are eligible.
- Vast does not have data caps so customers with additional usage will not be charged any additional fees.
- Vast will work with customers individually affected by this crisis that may need special arrangements to ensure their services are not interrupted.
- Vast Broadband is offering broadband services to students at Black Hills State University who do not currently have internet access at home. Vast will offer the following to ensure all students have access to online courses: Free Vast Essentials Connection (30 mbps download speed/5 mbps upload speed) and wireless modem for two months. No standard installation fees or contracts.
Students who need internet access should contact the BHSU Help Desk via email at BHSUHelpDesk@BHSU.edu or via telephone at 605-642-6580 and be ready to provide contact information.

**888-745-2888 | [VASTbroadband.com](https://vastbroadband.com)
email: info@vastbroadband.com**

MIDCONTINENT

As a commitment to our customers, we won't disconnect services to customers financially affected by the Coronavirus pandemic for the next 60 days (through May 15). We will lead with compassion and work with those directly impacted. **If you are having financial difficulties during this time, please contact our customer care representatives using the contact options at the bottom of this page, so we can make accommodations.**

With so many students at home now and lots of coursework to complete, we're reminding schools and communities about the [Lifeline](#) program. It's a federal program intended to put home phone and internet service within reach of qualifying families – giving low-income households affordable home phone or internet access.

The Lifeline Internet Service is \$14.95 per month (includes modem), but with a subsidy credit, the customer's cost is \$5.70 a month for 25 Mbps downloads and up to 3 Mbps uploads service. Typically, the online application and approval process takes three to five days. Once approval is complete, the service installation is free.

AT&T

AT&T is planning to help you stay connected throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. We recognize that staying in touch with your family, friends, school and work has never been more important.

Below are a few ways we're helping consumers, small businesses, and enterprises across the country.

AT&T is proud to support our customers by pledging that, for the next 60 days, we will:

- Not terminate the service of any wireless, home phone or broadband residential or small business customer because of their inability to pay their bill due to disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic.
- Waive any late payment fees that any wireless, home phone or broadband residential or small business customer may incur because of economic hardship related to the coronavirus pandemic.
- **(NEW)** Waive domestic wireless plan overage charges for data, voice or text for residential or small business wireless customers incurred because of economic hardship related to the coronavirus pandemic.
- Keep our public Wi-Fi hotspots open for anyone who needs them.
- AT&T is also funding 60 days of free access and unlimited usage of [Caribu](#), a video-calling application that allows family members to read, draw, and play games with one another while in distant locations. The Caribu application, which integrates children's books, coloring activities, and games will be available to families across the country and around the world, free of cost, for the next two months.
- Unlimited AT&T Home Internet – All AT&T consumer home internet wireline customers, as well as Fixed Wireless Internet, can use unlimited internet data. Additionally, we'll continue to offer internet access for qualifying limited income households at \$10 a month through our [Access from AT&T program](#). We've expanded eligibility to Access from AT&T to households participating in the National School Lunch Program and Head Start. Additionally, we're offering new Access from AT&T customers two months of free service.

The coronavirus pandemic is causing many hardships. If you find yourself in financial trouble and unable to pay your bill, we're here to help you. Please contact us at 800-288-2020 for AT&T broadband, residential wireless or small business services and 611 from your AT&T device for wireless service.

CITY OF RAPID CITY UTILITY SERVICES (GARBAGE, WATER & SEWER)

Our primary goal is to keep the community and the public healthy:

- The City is increasing its free parking feature on downtown parking meters from 15 minutes to 30 minutes to promote food pickups and other short-term business-to-customer transactions as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The City of Rapid City announced Tuesday it will **discontinue** utility shutoffs of water, sewer and solid waste collection until further notice to allow for proper sanitation during the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Residents are strongly encouraged to use the City's online services for payments as well as utilize the night depository box on the west side of the City Hall building, which is available any time of day. The public can also call or e-mail questions by contacting the individual City department. Contact information can be found on the City's website at www.rcgov.org

KEIFFER SANITATION

Dear Kieffer Sanitation Customer:

Our number one value at Kieffer Sanitation is the safety of our employees, our customers, and the communities we serve. We are closely monitoring the current situation and are following guidance from the CDC, WHO, and our state and local public health officials. We recognize that the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak has tremendous unknowns and could cause unanticipated service delays, service interruptions, or unusually high call volumes.

We provide an essential service within our communities and strive to meet our customer commitments. At Kieffer Sanitation, we have developed and implemented business continuity plans to ensure our operations run as effectively as possible during this unique period in order to keep our commitment to provide the best possible service in a courteous, effective manner, and show respect and gratitude for those we are fortunate to serve.

CENTURY LINK

CenturyLink understands the critical role of our network services in these times. We will continue to closely monitor the developments related to coronavirus and we have comprehensive planning for its potential impacts to our people, our communities and our valued customers.

At CenturyLink, we know our customers are counting on us to keep our network running so our children can continue to learn and the world's businesses can continue to run efficiently. We stand ready, willing and able to meet our customers' near-term and long-term needs and are prepared to ensure traffic flows smoothly across our network, regardless of increased demand.

- We will waive late fees and will not terminate a residential or small business customer's service for the next 60 days due to financial circumstances associated with COVID-19.
- Today, we committed to the FCC's 'Keep Americans Connected Pledge' outlining these actions. We are also suspending data usage limits due to COVID-19.

SOUTH DAKOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

Payment Assistance and Budgeting

As a customer of a utility service provider, you have an obligation to pay for the services you use. There may be times when you have difficulty meeting those financial obligations. Early and honest communication with the utility company is one of the best first steps you can make to work your way through the challenging situation. You should also be aware of the following helpful tools.

- **Low Income Energy Assistance Program**
Qualifying consumers may apply to the Office of Energy Assistance within the South Dakota Department of Social Services for the [Low Income Energy Assistance Program \(LIEAP\)](#) that provides payment for some home heating costs.
- **Weatherization Assistance Program**
The South Dakota Department of Social Services' [Weatherization Assistance Program](#) helps qualifying residents make their homes more energy efficient through weatherization improvements. The improvements are completed by four different community action programs serving specific counties.
- **Lifeline and Tribal Lifeline and Link-Up Telephone Assistance Programs**
Most South Dakota telephone companies offer the [Lifeline program](#) for their qualifying customers. Lifeline offers a discount on basic local telephone service. [Tribal Lifeline and Link-Up](#) programs are available for residents of tribal lands. Tribal Link-Up Provides a discount on the installation or activation for new telephone service. Applicants must meet certain eligibility requirements for the programs.
- **Electric and Natural Gas Utility Budgeting Services**
Although not a discount program, balanced billing offered by electric or natural gas providers can be a valuable tool for managing your budget. With balanced billing, the utility company reviews your past bills to determine a monthly average. You are billed this average amount each month, regardless of how much energy you actually use. Some months your energy use is higher, some months it's lower. But you always pay the same amount. The company tracks monthly usage, monitors your account and lets you know if adjustments to the balanced billing are necessary.

Web site links found throughout www.PUC.SD.gov are intended to provide helpful resources. Inclusion of a Web link on this site is not necessarily an endorsement of an organization, product or service.

FCC KEEP AMERICANS CONNECTED

<https://www.fcc.gov/keep-americans-connected>