

## **CATAWISSA BOROUGH**

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### **Landlord Information**

Catawissa Electric is a municipal owned and maintained electric company. This offers the electric company specific benefits when it comes to rental properties.

State legislation known as the Municipal Claims and Liens Act allows municipal utilities to hold property owners responsible for tenant debt. This could include action against the landlord for the amount due for service provided at the owner's property which could be in the form of a municipal claim lien or civil action at the District Justice.

Catawissa Borough takes every avenue open to them to collect from the tenant; however there are times when payment is requested from the landlord.

Procedures taken to help protect Catawissa Borough and the property owners include:

### **Security Deposits**

The Borough requires a security deposit of \$150.00 for properties with electric heat and \$100 for properties with any other form of heat for any new account opened. If the new customer can show that he/she had excellent credit with the previous electric utility, the security deposit requirement is waived.

The security deposit may be required at a later time if the customer's payment history reflects a drastic negative change in the customer's payment habits. This is usually associated with electric disconnect for non-payment.

### **Electric Disconnect**

Disconnection of electric service offers when an account becomes 45-47 days past due. Notice is given prior to shut-off to allow the customer a chance to pay the delinquent account and avoid shut-off.

This procedure is only used from April 15 through November 15 for residential properties. Electric disconnects during the winter months may cause freezing water pipes and other complications associated with the cold weather, so a limiter is used as a means for collection of past due residential accounts other than the time frame stated above.

### **Collection of Delinquencies for Rental Property Electric Accounts**

If an account holder fails to pay delinquent charges for electric service, he or she will be able to establish a new account in Catawissa Borough only if payment of the delinquent amount is made within 15 days of opening the new account. If an account holding renter relocates to another resident in Catawissa without paying the final bill on the previous account, that final bill is paid from the security deposit or it is mailed to the new account address. If it is not paid, it is charged to the new account.

In the case of renters who: (1) vacate the rental property with a delinquent amount owing; (2) do not have an adequate security deposit to cover the owed amount; and (3) do not establish another account in Catawissa Borough, the Borough will attempt to collect the delinquent amount in one or more ways. These include continued in-house collection efforts, and filing of civil action against the account holder in District Court.

If all efforts to collect the debt from the account holding renter are unsuccessful, the Borough will seek payment of the debt by the property owner. All municipal charges including utility charges must be paid at or before settlement if the property is being sold. Therefore, if necessary, the Borough may also file a lien against the property that must be satisfied when the property is sold.

Catawissa Borough does not wish to contribute to the problem some landlords have experienced on being forced to pay delinquent electric charges accumulated by their tenants. On the other hand, you can understand the Borough's reluctance to disconnect service to residential properties, especially those that are electrically heated, during the coldest months of the year.

In order to minimize the risk that you as a landlord would become responsible for your tenant's unpaid electric utility charges, it is recommended that you take such measures as properly screening tenants, including credit references, and retaining adequate security deposits. Some landlords choose to have the electric utility accounts for rental properties in their name in order to insure regular payment by tenants. Landlords also are entitled to information on account balances for rental property they own. This information is available by written request.

Information about tenant accounts may also be obtained from time to time if required in writing to Catawissa Borough Electric, PO Box 44, Catawissa PA 17820,

Any questions or comments can be made by phone, mail or e-mail.