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**10.00 PAYMENT OF BILLS****10.01 Due Date**

The due date printed on customer bills will not be more than five days before the next scheduled billing date. However, customers who have selected the Automated Bank Draft option may select a due date which is greater than five days before the next scheduled billing date.

Scheduled billing dates will not be less than twenty-five (25) days apart.

**10.02 Late Payment Charge**

Delinquent amounts are subject to a late payment charge of 1.5% (18% annually) or \$1.00, whichever is greater. No late payment charge will be applied if the delinquent amount is \$10.00 or less.

"Delinquent amount" is the portion of a customer's account representing charges for gas service past due. For customers on the Budget Plan or a deferred payment schedule, "delinquent amount" is the lesser of the unpaid account balance or past due scheduled payments.

All payments received will be credited against the oldest outstanding account balance before application of any late payment charge. The late payment charge will be assessed on unpaid amounts at the next scheduled billing date.

**10.03 Budget Plan**

The Budget Plan is a twelve (12) month payment plan which allows eligible customers to pay for natural gas service in approximately equal monthly payments. Every six months the monthly payment will be reviewed and adjusted, if necessary, to reflect variances in actual versus estimated usage, and differences in actual versus forecasted billing rates. If an adjustment is necessary, the customer has the option to pay the new monthly amount or drop from the plan.

An outstanding balance will not make a customer ineligible for the Budget Plan. In calculating the Budget Plan amount, any outstanding balances will be spread equally and added to the monthly payment amount.

An eligible customer can enroll any time during the year.

**10.04 End of Season Adjustments to the Budget Plan**

At the start of the next Budget year, interest is credited to the customer's account for any net overpayment. If at the start of the next Budget year, the cumulative Budget Plan payments are different than the cumulative charges, then CenterPoint Energy will add the balance to the total estimated charges for the next Budget Plan year and spread the balance over the next twelve (12) months.

**10.05 Cancellation of the Budget Plan for Non-Payment**

A Budget Plan customer with a past due balance including two (2) or more Budget Plan payments is in default on the Budget Plan agreement and may be removed from the Budget Plan. The balances previously deferred under the Budget Plan will become immediately due and payable. However, a customer removed from the Budget Plan because of a default can be reinstated by paying the unpaid Budget Plan payments or the actual amount due in full.

**10.06 Status of Budget Plan Customers**

CenterPoint Energy will continue the customer on the Budget Plan until:

- 1) default for nonpayment;
- 2) the customer requests removal.

**10.07 Returned Check Charge**

A \$10.00 charge will be assessed whenever CenterPoint Energy is notified by a financial institution that a check, draft, or negotiable instrument drawn by the customer has been dishonored.

**10.08 Payment Agreements**

CenterPoint Energy shall offer payment agreements to residential customers for the payment of arrears. Payment agreements shall consider the customer's financial circumstances and any extenuating circumstances of the household. No additional service deposit may be charged to continue service if the customer has entered and is reasonably on time under an accepted payment agreement.