



RCA Consumer e-News

WINTER 2019

A Renter's Guide to Setting up Utilities

Do you know which utilities you need to set up?

Usually, landlords will cover certain utilities like water and trash. Some condominiums, townhomes, and single family homes that have homeowner's associations may also include basic cable service. Make sure to check with your landlord before contacting the utility companies.

Your lease agreement should also tell you which utilities are included in your rent and which ones you are responsible for.

Electric and Natural Gas. Some buildings have a single electric or gas meter that serves more than one rental unit. In other buildings, a tenant's electric or gas meter may also measure usage in a common area, such as the laundry room or the lobby.

If you have to set up or re-establish electric or natural gas service for your apartment, utility companies can typically start service with three days' notice. However, it is best to contact them well in advance so that you have plenty of time for any in-person appointments you might need to start or transfer utility services.

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If you are interested in getting a general idea of what the bills may run at the service location, the utility companies can provide you the highest, lowest, and average bill for the last 12 months. However, your actual monthly bill will vary based on usage and other factors.



If the apartment has poor insulation, talk to your landlord about making some energy efficiency improvements in the apartment. We also recommend that you download the utilities' consumer portal. Online portals offer valuable features to help you save energy, lower your bills, and budget better than ever before.

Water and sewer services. If these services are not included in your rent, you'll need to set them up yourself with the utility that provides the services in your area. In Anchorage, single family homes pay a flat rate of about \$104 a month. However, multi-family units have metered service and therefore cost will vary based on usage.



Internet, Cable, and Telephone. Internet costs will depend on what speed you are purchasing.

The cost of cable depends on what kind of package you purchase, any additional channels, and if you are receiving access to On Demand. If your rent includes basic cable provided by your landlord or through a homeowner's association, make sure the cable company is aware of this.

When signing up for landline telephone service, know what type of telephone service you will be receiving – whether service is provided over broadband connections, such as Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) or a traditional landline, which is typically powered over copper telephone lines. Broadband-enabled telephone service will not work during electric outages without a battery or backup power source. Traditional telephone service may work during electric power outages, though you may need to use a corded phone. Many cordless phones rely on electric power to operate. Before purchasing a bundled service that includes internet, cable, and telephone, make sure you read the full terms and conditions.

After all utilities are set up, go through your apartment and make sure everything is working properly. Turn faucets, light switches, and appliances on and off, and let your landlord know immediately if anything is broken.

If you need help with a landlord-tenant matter, you may want to first review your rights under the [Uniform Residential Landlord and Tenant Act](#), the Alaska law that addresses landlord-tenant issues.

If you receive a housing subsidy or live in a federal or state housing project, you may have rights in addition to those provided by state law. Contact the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation's Public Housing Division for more information.

The RCA cannot provide legal advice regarding the law or represent individuals in a legal dispute.

The RCA's primary role is to provide information about public utilities and assist utility customers in resolving their disputes with utility companies.

What Telecom Deregulation (Senate Bill 83) Means to Alaskan Consumers

The telecom deregulation has many Alaskans and consumer advocates wondering what will this mean for everyone across the state. Signed into law on August 29, 2019, Senate Bill 83 (SB83) became effective just before Thanksgiving. The new law eliminates a number of telecom rules including the need for phone companies or carriers to file tariffs and annual reports.

Tariffs filed with the RCA set out the rates, terms, and conditions that apply to regulated public utilities. In the past, carriers that provide basic local and instate long distance services had to file tariffs and supporting documents with the RCA, where regulators and interested parties could review them.



Under SB83, this means that carriers may now adjust their rates or make changes to their terms and conditions without RCA approval.



Although the requirement to file tariffs has been eliminated, the new law, however, requires carriers to offer the same rates, terms, and conditions for basic residential telephone service to consumers within the same certificated service areas.

R-19-002

The RCA is considering changes in the Title 3 of the Alaska Administrative Code to conform telecommunications regulations to the required statutory changes and regulatory exemptions enacted by SB83 (Chapter 24 SLA 19).

The outcome of this rulemaking proceeding will establish clear rules and regulations that apply to phone companies and what SB83 ultimately means for Alaskan consumers.

To review and comment on the rulemaking proceeding, visit this link: [View Public Notices and Submit Comment](#).

Comments must be filed by January 17, 2020.

Dealing with Phone Companies:

Disputes, Making Payments, and Service Shut-Offs

With the passage of SB83, the RCA consumer protection staff may not be able to assist in all situations. Nonetheless, here are some tips for resolving complaints about billing or quality of service.

STEP 1: Contact the carrier first.

Before contacting the RCA, we recommend that you give the phone company an opportunity to resolve your complaint by contacting their customer service department. To get the best results, consider what services and the billing cycle you are being billed for; what the rates, terms, and conditions are for services you are provided, and the minimum monthly payment.

Keep a record of the contact with the representative's name, the date of the call, and what was discussed.

STEP 2: Prepare to contact the RCA.

If the phone company is unable to resolve your dispute, or if you are dissatisfied with the resolution, you may contact the RCA for assistance. To obtain the best results for your interaction with the RCA's consumer protection staff, we recommend you have your telephone bill or contract documentation (terms and conditions) on hand when you call or send them by email at cp.mail@alaska.gov.

STEP 3: Contact the RCA

If you are familiar with our complaint process, filing your written complaint through the online portal is the fastest way to resolve your complaint. Visit www.rca.alaska.gov and click on the link "[File an Informal Complaint](#)."

The RCA's role is to provide information and assist customers in resolving utility disputes.

Other Resources

Federal Communications
Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554
1-888-CALL-FCC (225-5322)
www.fcc.gov

Alaska Department of Law
Consumer Protection Unit
(907) 269-5200
1-888-576-2529 (outside
Anchorage)
www.law.alaska.gov

Better Business Bureau
4341 B Street, Suite 100
Anchorage, AK 99503
(907) 644-5200
www.bbb.org/us/ak

Are you prepared for the next earthquake?

November 30, 2019, marks the first year anniversary of the 7.1 earthquake that shook southcentral Alaska.

Visit www.ready.gov and take some time to review and check these safety tips so you're prepared before, during, and after the next big earthquake.



Make a Plan ([link](#))

Power Outages ([link](#))

Cold/Extreme Weather ([link](#))

Generator Safety ([link](#))

Food Safety ([link](#))

Pet Owners ([link](#))

This Consumer e-News is a quarterly publication of the RCA's
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