



**FILED**  
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 OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK

# Procedure

<b>Title</b> Waivers for Retail Customers		<b>Number</b> CS-340	<b>Rev. no.</b> 0
<b>Responsibility</b> Utility Accounts Division; Risk and Quality Assurance Division		<b>Supersedes</b> N/A	<b>Pages</b> 3
<b>General Manager/CEO signature</b> /s/ Mami Hara	<b>Approval date</b> January 27, 2020	<b>Effective date</b> February 1, 2020	

1. **PURPOSE**  
To establish procedures for granting full or partial waivers of utility billing charges to residential or commercial properties within SPU's retail water, wastewater, drainage and solid waste service area.
2. **SCOPE**  
This procedure applies to the Utility Accounts and Risk and Quality Assurance divisions.
3. **AUTHORITY**  
The General Manager/Chief Executive Officer may make exceptions to time limits, approval levels, and other billing requirements according to Director's Rule FIN-160, Customer Account and Billing Management.

The Utility Account Services (UAS) Manager and Hearing Officer (HO) are authorized to waive charges for services after a thorough evaluation of facts, evidence, and customer account history. As designees of the GM/CEO, they may consult with the Law Department and other relevant staff.

4. **RULE**  
Waivers are exceptions made by the GM/CEO or authorized designee to SPU's established time limits, dollar thresholds, and other billing requirements.  
  
Under FIN-160, SPU generally does not provide waivers of charges for services because it has a statutory duty to collect for services provided and to keep charges uniform for the same class of customers. Therefore, waivers shall be used only in limited or exceptional circumstances.

- The following are generally not eligible for waivers:
- Theft
  - Vandalism
  - Fraud
  - System tampering
  - Customer disregard for SPU advice
  - Customer negligence

## 5. PROCEDURE

### A. Utility Account Services (UAS)

- 1) Assists customers who have been referred by SPU's Customer Response Division.
- 2) Resolves customer requests and inquiries that are not escalating through SPU's progressive dispute resolution process (as outlined in CS-104, Customer Service Billing Disputes).
- 3) Refers customers to SPU's progressive dispute resolution process if, at any point, a customer requests to dispute charges or SPU decisions.
- 4) Escalates situations that may be eligible for waiver to the UAS Manager, and provides support, as needed, with any further investigation.
- 5) Provides customer with SPU's decision and rationale for granting or denying customer's requested outcome.

### B. Hearing Officer

- 1) When a dispute escalates to an appeal, prepares a final written administrative decision on behalf of the General Manager/Chief Executive Officer that documents findings in support or denial of exercising a waiver.

### C. Utility Account Services Manager / Hearing Officer

- 1) Documents waivers on account records. If a waiver is granted, a written response will be prepared by either designee to document the findings in support of exercising the waiver.
- 2) Consults with the Law Department and other internal staff as needed to ensure clarity on how the waivers are exercised and applied consistently and equitably.

### D. Customer Account and Billing Services

- 1) Generates a billing adjustment that captures the original and revised billing amounts.
- 2) Receives and reviews any supporting documentation to process the adjustment.
- 3) Notes the customer's account in SPU's billing system.

Standard processing time for granting waivers is 30 business days upon receipt by SPU, unless an extension is granted. Standard processing may include, but is not limited to, writing an initial response to the customer's dispute, performing investigations, gathering data, and documenting and communicating decisions to the customer.

## 6. DOCUMENTATION AND EXPECTATIONS

In compliance with this procedure, Customer Service job aids may be created for technical reference. The Utility Accounts Division Director oversees the job aids and ensures compliance with the Director's Rule FIN-160, Customer Account and Billing Management. A list of eligibility criteria and job aids will be stored on the division's SharePoint site.

A waiver requires appropriate documentation to include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Nature of the investigation, findings, and a summary of basis for exercising a waiver.
- Creating and retaining records that document what transpired, including, but not limited, to:
  - System notes summarizing the chronology of events
  - Customer's account and billing history
  - Electronic record exchanges between SPU and the customer
  - Spreadsheet showing the calculations
  - Supporting documents provided by customer (i.e. photos, videos, diagrams, invoices, receipts of repair, etc.)
  - Copy of the customer's written dispute letter and any other supporting documentation that captures the monetary relief sought or outcome desired
- Applicable laws, codes, rules, policies, and/or procedures

Retention of records must comply with City of Seattle and State of Washington retention schedule.

### **SPU Waiver Log**

The Utility Account Services Manager and the Hearing Officer will write a summary in SPU's Waiver Log of each case where waiver was exercised. The waiver log will be owned by the Utility Account Services Manager. The following groups shall coordinate the reporting and maintenance of this log: Hearing Officer, Utility Account Services Manager, Accounting Division Director/Controller, and the Development Services Office Director.

## **7. QUALITY ASSURANCE**

On a semi-annual basis, the Utility Accounts Division Director shall review approved waiver transactions and identify any issues. On an annual basis, the Deputy Director over the Utility Accounts Division shall submit a waiver report to the General Manager/Chief Executive Officer based on this review for further analysis and decision making.

## **8. AUTHORITY/REFERENCES**

- FIN-160, Customer Account and Billing Management Director's Rule
- CS-104, Customer Dispute Policy and Procedure
- CS-320, Billing Adjustments for Retail and Wholesale Customers