Water Shutoffs
What Needs To Be Done and What You Can Do

Millions of people nationwide are at immediate risk of shutoff or already shutoff. State and local water shutoff moratoriums expiring and possible future increases in water shutoffs due to the economic downturn only increase the chances of more water shutoffs

The Sierra Club is advocating for utilities to:
- Suspend shut-offs for nonpayment
- Order reinstitution of services without being assessed a reconnection fee
- Waive late fees, effective immediately, until further notice
- Suspend the collection and credit reporting for nonpayment

What should be in a consumer assistance program (CAP)
- Include a bill insert in the next billing cycle noting all financial assistance or flexible payment programs available, and how the customer can access more information about such programs.
- Description of the specific eligibility requirements and timeframe for programs specific to coronavirus relief.
- Utilities should make this information accessible to all customers.
- Submit a CAP to their regulating authority that describes the steps each utility will take to address the economic hardship of residential customers.
- The plan should consider reforms to the utility’s working definition of “low-income”

Reach out to the utility itself
Sometimes it is not clear what type of utility yours is or who regulates it. Go to your utility website for that information and see if they are doing disconnections. If it’s not on their website then give them a call asking.
- Call them as a customer to ask them to stop disconnecting because of nonpayment
- Send them an email outlining the best course of action for utilities during this time
- Use social media to reach out to them
Collaborate with frontline groups
There is an opportunity to partner with the folks on the ground who are already doing water shut off advocacy. Most of these groups have been doing this work well before the public health pandemic. Reaching out to them to help lift up their work and provide support should be the first step. Be sure to connect with other Sierra Club staff or volunteers who may already have a working relationship.

In the circumstance where there is not an existing Sierra Club relationship with a frontline group focused on water shutoffs, then you could build a relationship and find ways to be an ally on the issue of water shut-offs. Foster an atmosphere where everyone can ask for and give feedback without judgment. Once the new relationship is established around shut off you may find ways to collaborate on other issues.

Water is a Human Right
Lack of access to water has a devastating effect and has consequences for the realization of other human rights.

If you choose to build a relationship, there is some guidance from the Organizing Department for you to review to help guide your outreach. In addition, there is a power point that the Organizing Department has that you might find helpful. The principles and processes provide important guidance in determining who to reach out to and how to build even a couple relationships with groups working in the area of interest. Refer to Sierra Club’s and Justice Principles Equity Language about best practices around using respectful, thoughtful language in your communications.

Campaign tactics and principals
✓ AddUp is Sierra Club’s online engagement hub, where you can easily build a single AddUp campaign that will host a variety of online actions your supporters can take
✓ Reach out to your networks and social media, emphasizing what volunteers gain by giving their time
✓ Send email invitations to ask for volunteers or hold a webinar or conference call as a first step. Target specific groups, like area residents, activists, or environment-related professionals, neighborhood associations, political parties, local alumni associations, social justice organizations, faith-based organizations, or local student groups.
✓ Determine effective methods of communication based on what people feel comfortable using.
✓ Respect people’s time keep folks involved with clear expectations and accountability, delegate responsibilities according to people’s expertise or opportunity to grow. and show their impact.

Regardless of whether your campaign is successful show appreciation and express the impact and hard word by volunteers with a thank you or gathering to celebrate.