

From: [Mayor](#)
To: [Mayor](#)
Subject: COVID-19 Update: Utility bill help
Date: Tuesday, September 1, 2020 6:14:23 PM



A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Julie Woodward".

The City of Spokane **COVID-19 News Update for Sept. 1**

Information about Coronavirus Disease 19 (COVID-19) is evolving rapidly. We want to make sure our City employees have up-to-date information. We will provide this update, as needed, to communicate what you need to know, while we work to reduce the spread of this disease in our community and continue to provide critical public services.

A Message from Mayor Woodward

COVID-19 has taken its toll on the Spokane's economic health. Closed businesses and reduced revenues impact more than the economy, of course. They impact people—employees and business owners—our citizens.

Between January and June of this year, about 2,400 more City of Spokane utility customers have gotten behind on their bills. We understand.

As the pandemic continues, we want to highlight the options available to assist residential and business customers with their City utility bills for water, sewer, stormwater and garbage.

The options are part of the City's continuing efforts to ease the strain on City utility customers during widespread closures of schools and small businesses.

- Low-income households facing financial hardship can seek direct financial assistance from the City's U-Help program by calling SNAP at 456.SNAP. About \$67,000 in assistance has been distributed through the middle of August.
- Residential customers also can apply for payment arrangements without interest. The self-service options are available [on the City's web site](#).
- Businesses can seek a deferral of City utility charges with an agreement to pay those charges over time also without interest. Businesses can begin the process by [filling out a form on our web site](#).

Early in the pandemic, the City suspended late fees and water service shut-offs for non-payment of City utility bills in mid-March, and Washington state has continued those mitigation measures for all utilities through mid-October. We also spearheaded a fund-raising campaign with our partners, SNAP and the Salvation Army.

The financial hardship caused by the pandemic is real for so many families and individuals. We are hopeful that these options can help in some small way.

Notes from Human Resources Director Amber Richards

Back in April, I bet most, if not all of us would have expected life to be back to normal before September... yet here we are still operating in and adjusting to the different things COVID-19 is throwing at us. For some this means continued remote work/telecommuting. We would like to encourage telecommuting team members to take a few moments to re-evaluate/review the following resources to make sure you are set up for long-term success!

- **Adherence to State/City Policies** – remembering that location and/or method of work does not negate or change these:
 - Reminder that the Public Records Act is still in force and applies to our email, other forms of communication, data, etc. With very limited exception – everything we do is subject to the PRA. This is not unique to a remote work situation. It does makes adherence to the policy below even more important!
 - City policy regarding use of personal devices:
<https://static.spokanecity.org/documents/opendata/policies/2018/admin-5600-17-06-corrected.pdf>
- **Remote work best practices and reminders:**
 - Healthy boundaries and personal/team accountability are important in a remote-work environment. A topic of focus we are hearing about recently is related to electronic monitoring. Like the reference above to the Public Records Act – the City has the right to inspect City-owned devices at any time. We should conduct our business with the understanding that no privacy interests exist in the devices we are provided to use.
 - It is important to keep ergonomics in mind in your remote workspace – over time poor posture can lead to a variety of health issues. With this in mind, it is also important to note there are restrictions to what city-issued equipment can be transported to the telecommute area – things such as laptops, keyboard, headsets, are allowed with approval from your supervisor, while things like chairs, desks, filing cabinets are prohibited.
 - Also of note, Human Resources has a long-term goal to revise the telework agreement and create a more comprehensive Flexible Work Arrangement policy that will incorporate some of the best practices that we are learning/gathering through this experience.

All of this info, and much more, can be found on the [Employee Portal for COVID-19](#). This is your one-stop-shop for event-related guidance and best practices. If you can't find what you're looking for, please reach out to the HR Team!

City Flag Designs

Have an idea for a new City flag? Design submissions are being accepted until Oct. 1. Go to the [City's web site for all the details](#).



More Information to Assist Our Employees

Here are some more resources from our Employee Assistance Program:

- [City of Spokane EAP Benefits](#)

The City of Spokane EAP provides support and resources to help you better manage a broad range of life events and challenges, including:

- Stress
- Family and relationship concerns
- Drug and alcohol concerns
- Grief and loss
- Depression and anxiety
- Work-related issues
- Financial and legal questions

With just a phone call or a click of a mouse, you have access to mental health counselors, attorneys, and financial advisors to help you lead a healthier, happier, and more productive life. EAP services are available at no cost to the City of Spokane employees, their dependents, and household members and are available 24 hours a day/365 days per year. KEPRO provides services.

- [Relationship Help: Advice for Building Satisfying Relationships That Last](#)

A healthy, secure romantic relationship can be an ongoing source of support and happiness in life. It can strengthen all aspects of your well-being, from your physical and mental health to your work and connections with others. However, a relationship that isn't supportive can be a tremendous drain on you emotionally. Love and relationships take work, commitment, and a willingness to adapt and change with your partner. Whether you're looking to keep a healthy relationship strong or repair a relationship on the rocks, these tips can help you build a caring and lasting union.

To access more topics related to COVID-19 visit: [FAPHelpLink.com](https://www.faphelp.com), using company code: **CITSPO**

Employee Information Portal (covid19.spokanecity.org/)

Remember, this Employee Information Portal is a great resource for employees to stay current on what's happening with the COVID-19 response. The [Employee Information Portal](#) can be accessed from work or home, using a computer or mobile device. All of the emailed information we have sent to employees is archived here.