



STATE OF NEBRASKA  
**Office of the Attorney General**

2115 STATE CAPITOL BUILDING  
 LINCOLN, NEBRASKA 68509-8920  
 (402) 471-2682  
 TDD (402) 471-2682  
 CAPITOL FAX (402) 471-3297  
 1235 K ST. FAX (402) 471-4725

**DON STENBERG**  
 ATTORNEY GENERAL

L. STEVEN GRASZ  
 SAM GRIMMINGER  
 DEPUTY ATTORNEYS GENERAL

# 93083  
 NO. STATE OF NEBRASKA  
 OFFICIAL  
 OCT 19 1993  
 DEPT. OF JUSTICE

DATE: October 13, 1993  
 SUBJECT: Municipal Utility Billings  
 REQUESTED BY: Senator Floyd P. Vrtiska  
 Nebraska State Legislature  
 WRITTEN BY: Don Stenberg, Attorney General  
 Linda L. Willard, Assistant Attorney General

You have asked several questions regarding charges by municipalities for utilities. Your first question is whether it is permissible under current statute for municipalities with combined utility ordinances to combine the fees charged for garbage hauling services with those charged for utilities such as water and/or electricity. We have found no current statutes that prohibit combining bills for utilities with garbage hauling services.

You next ask if it is permissible under current statute for municipalities with combined utility ordinances to disconnect a utility service for nonpayment of fees for services such as garbage hauling which are combined with that utility's billing. There are several statutes which currently exist that are addressed to the proper methods of notice and hearing when a utility seeks to disconnect services. None of these statutes specifically address the question which you have asked. However, in *Garner v. City of Aurora*, 149 Neb. 295, 30 N.W.2d 917 (1948), the Nebraska Supreme Court determined that a municipal public service could not attempt to collect a delinquent garbage disposal bill by shutting off the water supply of the patron. See also 64 Am. Jur. 2d *Public Utilities* § 18.

Your final question is whether garbage hauling is considered to be a "utility" under current statute the same as water and electricity. Nebraska statutes do not generally define utilities

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 J. Kirk Brown  
 David T. Bydalek  
 Laurie Smith Camp  
 Delores N. Coe-Barbee  
 Dale A. Comer

James A. Elworth  
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 Lauren Lee Hill  
 William L. Howland  
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 Donald A. Kohtz  
 Joseph P. Loudon  
 Charles E. Lowe  
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 Lynn A. Melson  
 Harold I. Mosher

Fredrick F. Neid  
 Marie C. Pawol  
 Kenneth W. Payne  
 Paul N. Potadle  
 Jan E. Remppe  
 James H. Spears  
 Mark D. Starr

John R. Thompson  
 Barry Wald  
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 Alfonza Whitaker  
 Melanie J. Whittamore-Mantzios  
 Linda L. Willard

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except as it relates to unclaimed property. Under the definition of utilities in the unclaimed property section, Neb. Rev. Stat. § 69-1301(h) (1990), garbage services would not be included as a utility. However, it has been included in the definition of utility in cases in several other states. In *Southern Liquid Gas Company v. City of Dothan*, 44 S.2d 744, 747, 253 Ala. 350 (1950), the court determined that an essential element of a "utility" is that it is both serving and is constituted to serve all inhabitants in the area who comply with reasonable conditions. In *City of Wichita Falls v. Kemp Hotel Operating Company*, 162 S.W.2d 150 (Tex. 1942), it was determined that the public service of ridding premises of waste and equipment used in connection therewith constituted a public utility, and, therefore, the city's contract with an individual for removal and disposition of garbage was held to constitute a "public utility."

In summary, there is no prohibition under current statutes for municipalities with combined utility ordinances to combine the fees charged for garbage hauling services with those charged for utilities such as water and/or electricity. Additionally, under Nebraska case law, a municipality may not disconnect a utility service such as water or electricity for nonpayment of garbage hauling fees. Finally, Nebraska statutes do not currently define garbage services as a utility but case law from some states has included garbage service as a utility.

Sincerely,

DON STENBERG  
Attorney General

  
Linda L. Willard  
Assistant Attorney General

28-03-14.op

cc: Patrick J. O'Donnell  
Clerk of the Legislature

APPROVED:

  
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Attorney General