



#### **Consumer Affairs Part I:**

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#### **Consumer Affairs Part I:**

- Consumer Bill of Rights; Consumer Responsibilities
- Managing Public Involvement
- Role of Regulators in Providing Consumer
   Protections; Scope of Protections
- Consumer Education
- Enhancing Consumer Interface
- Consumer Input into the Regulatory Decision
   Making Process

- The Missouri Pubic Service Commission (PSC) will ensure Missourians receive safe and adequate utility service at just and reasonable rates.
- We will provide public information that a consumer can use to make educated utility choices.
- We will provide an efficient regulatory process that is responsive to all consumers queries.
- We will perform duties ethically and professionally when serving all consumers.

Residential customers have the following rights under the provisions of the Commission's Rules and Regulations:

- Right to utility service, if denied, company must provide an explanation for refusal and advise what steps are necessary to receive service.
- Speak to qualified utility personnel during normal business hours.
- Question and dispute all or part of a charge.
- File an informal / formal complaint with PSC.

- A disconnection notice from the utility company stating the date on or after which service will be discontinued for non-payment and appropriate action necessary to avoid discontinuance.
- Twenty-one (21) day extension if discontinuance of service will aggravate an existing medical emergency of any resident at the premise where service is rendered.



Avoid discontinuance of heat related service when the National Weather Service predicts the temperature will drop below 32° Fahrenheit (applies November 1 to March 31 during the Cold Weather Rule period).

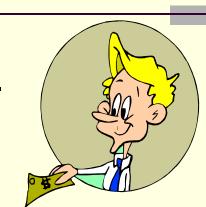
Avoid discontinuance of cooling related service when the National Weather Service predicts the temperature will rise above 95° Fahrenheit or that the heat index shall rise above 105° Fahrenheit (applies June 1 to September 31 during the Hot Weather Rule period).

## **Consumer Responsibilities**

- Plan Ahead:
  - ✓ While it is not required, consumers should contact the utility company several weeks before moving.
- Consumers must cooperate by providing key consumer information to the utility company:
  - Name and proof of identification
  - Service and mailing address
  - Contact information

## **Consumer Responsibilities**

- Pay a deposit if required.
- Pay your bill on time.



- Follow through on payment arrangements.
- Provide the company access to their equipment.
- Pay a bill correcting a previous undercharge.

## **Managing Public Involvement**



#### Public Comments:

- Rate cases
- Non-case related
- Rulemaking
- Other cases before the Commission
   (i.e. territorial agreements, FAC, ISRS)
- Local Public Hearings
- Workshops

#### Role of Regulators in Providing Consumer Protections; Scope of Protections

Missouri Public Service Commission is both quasijudicial and quasi-legislative. The PSC has the statutory responsibility of ensuring that consumers receive:

- Safe and adequate service <u>at</u>
- Just and reasonable rates
  - ✓ Rates must be set at a level which will provide the companies' shareholders an opportunity (not guarantee) to earn a reasonable return on their investment.

#### Role of Regulators in Providing Consumer Protections; Scope of Protections

- Ensure compliance with safety and quality of service standards.
- Enforcement of Commission rules, tariffs and statues.
- Rulemaking-promulgation of administrative rules and their enforcement.
- Operational safety of rural electric cooperatives and municipally owned utilities.

## How the Consumer Services Department Benefits the Consumer and Regulator

- First impression of the Public Service Commission.
- Capture metrics to identify trends by utility type: billing issues and service quality issues are identified by geographical area to react proactively rather than reactive.
- Improve inefficient processes to lower cycle time which in turn saves utilities and PSC time and lowers the cost of doing business.
- Identify educational needs.
- Legislators, policy makers and constituents learn more about utility rates and issues with easy access to information through the Consumer Services Department.

#### **Consumer Education**

Partnerships provide access to additional resources and expands your audience. Members of the organization immediately become an additional audience for the project.

#### MPSC Partnerships:

- Utility Companies
- Social Service Agencies
- Legislators
- Government Agencies
  - Local
  - > State
  - > Federal
- Faith Based Organizations
- > Schools
- Community Organizations

#### **Consumer Education**

Legislative Town Hall Meetings

- Education Forums
- Energy Fairs
- Health and Senior Service Fairs
- Missouri State Fair
- Missouri Legislative Black Caucus

# Preparing Consumers for the Heating Season

**EDUCATION CAMPAIGN** 

#### **Problem Statement**

- In May 2008, natural gas commodity prices were expected to be fifty percent 50% higher than the prices charged for natural gas the previous winter (2007-2008).
- Customers would not know of the expected out of pocket expenses for space heating until they received the bill just before or during the holiday season. For customers on budget billing, the shock of higher gas prices would be deferred, but would become a reality when bills adjusted to reflect actual usage.

#### **Objective**

■ Take all reasonable efforts to alert Missourians of the pending situation and place them in the best position to minimize the negative impacts they will experience in the 2008-2009 winter season.

#### **Solution**

- Develop a uniform message to communicate to consumers regarding the higher cost of energy and the consumers ability to control their energy cost.
- Develop a plan to distribute existing and newly created education material (i.e. bill inserts, brochures, posters, public service announcements, etc.) regarding the consumers ability to weatherize and conserve on their energy consumption.

#### **Action Items**

- Customer impact should be quantified based on prior winter's usage and expected winter gas prices and sent in customer messages.
- Segment customers into three categories for receipt of targeted information best suited for their situation. These categories are:
  - 1. customers with unpaid balances
  - 2. customers working at low income levels
  - customers that will experience reductions in their disposal income

#### **Action Items**

(continued)

Educate customers on things that can be done at:

- No Cost Measures
- Low Cost Measures
- Long-Term Measures
  - > no cost or inexpensively, immediately and have some quantifiable benefit
  - items that have greater cost, may require planning, be more long term in nature and have quantifiable benefit

#### **Action Items**

(continued)

Encourage utilities to explore creative messaging and unique educational opportunities they may have within their service territories to share messages of conservation and energy efficiency actions through the use of their:

- call centers
- bill inserts
- speaking opportunities at service group
- material that may be distributed to customers while company collectors are in the field
- radio call-in programming and other areas where utilities have public contact

#### **Action Items**

(continued)

- Develop or reference available information on energy efficiency/conservation efforts that can benefit renters.
- Inform customers of entities that can sell and install viable energy efficiency items (i.e. programmable thermostats) to reduce their energy consumption in the upcoming winter.
- Increase the number of individuals capable of performing detailed energy audits in order to timely satisfy public demand.

#### **Action Items**

(continued)

#### Seek the assistance of groups such as:

- Social Services
- Faith Based Organizations
- Community Entities
- Legislature
- Community Action Agency's
- AARP
- Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

- Department of Health and Senior Services
- In Home Health Care Providers
- Meals on Wheels
- Schools
- Boys & Girls Clubs
- Community Support Workers

#### **Action Items**

(continued)

#### Possible uniform message content:

- Wholesale natural gas markets are exempt from federal and state regulation.
- ➤ Gas distribution companies purchase gas for consumers and pass these costs directly on to consumers.
- Two-thirds of the average residential customers' natural gas bill is typically the purchased gas costs.
- ➤ Consumers have control over their usage which impacts their bill.

#### **Action Items**

(continued)

Explore the option of having Public Service Announcements (PSA) presented by Missouri celebrities (i.e. baseball, football or hockey players or famous entertainers).

#### Launch Date:

➤ Kickoff August through September in a effort to allow consumers time to take action for possible improvements to their housing stock prior to the cooler weather, but continue through winter heating season and summer cooling season.



prepare • conserve • save

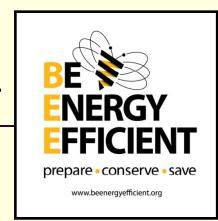
www.beenergyefficient.org



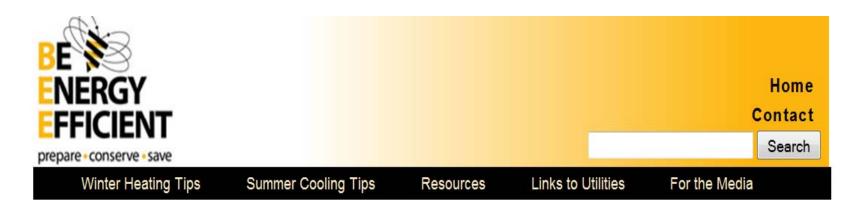
A co-initiative of the Missouri Public Service Commission and Missouri Department of Natural Resources' Division of Energy, BEE is also supported by many organizations and utilities serving the state of Missouri.



- Improve the energy efficiency of their household to reduce usage.
- **\*Utilize** weatherization programs to better prepare their homes for the winter.
- **\*Utilize the Cold Weather Rule provisions to protect consumers that are at a greater risk of being unable to afford natural gas.**
- **X**Utilize Budget Billing.



- **\*** "BEE" Website:
  - Winter Heating Tips
  - Summer Cooling Tips
  - Renewable Energy
  - ▶ Links to Utility Companies
  - Government Agencies and Programs
  - ▶ Energy Assistance Programs



#### What's The Buzz?

These days it seems as if everything is on the rise . . . grocery prices, gasoline prices and the cost of energy. It's getting tougher and tougher to maintain a household budget . . . and that's where BEE comes in.

BEE stands for "Be Energy Efficient," and is aimed at helping you remain in control of your energy bills. There are steps every household can take today to minimize energy use and stabilize related costs. Conservation is an all season opportunity. Energy saving tips for both the cooling and heating seasons can be found in this Web site.

A co-initiative of the Missouri Public Service Commission and Missouri Department of Natural Resources' Division of Energy, BEE is also supported by many organizations and utilities serving the state of Missouri.

Use links on the black navigation bar above to browse through our BEE site.

#### **Energy Assistance and Summer Cooling**

The links below are included among many others on our Resources Page.

- Summer Cooling Tips (Missouri Department of Natural Resources)
- · BEE Videos page
- Community Action Agencies (Missouri Association for Community Action)
- Low-Income Weatherization Assistance Program (Missouri Department of Natural Resources)
- State Emergency Management Agency Awareness Campaigns (State Emergency Management Agency)



#### **A** Publications:

- ▶ "The Buzz" Newsletter
- ▶ "Home Energy Savings Tip" Brochure
- "Utility Company Rebate Programs" Brochure
- "A Guide to Help Manage Your Utility Services"

Work jointly in a collaborative effort to educate Missouri consumers:

- Meet Periodically
  - Quarterly Roundtable
  - Individual Meetings with Utilities
- Educate PSC Staff and utility personnel on new services, rule and regulation changes, internal processes.
- Share information between PSC/OPC/Utilities/Other Consumer Interest Groups.
- Site Visits (scheduled and ad hoc).

Outreach Programs & Consumer Information by Utility:

- □ Voluntary Donations (Dollar More, Dollar-Help)
- □ Arrearage Forgiveness (Clean Slate Program)
- Weatherization
- □ Incentive Programs
- □ Rebate Programs
- □ Service Reliability Initiatives
- ☐ Health and Safety Programs

#### Consumer Education / Information:

- Communicate with consumers either verbally, face-to-face, email or in writing regarding their questions or concerns.
- Provide information sheets, brochures, guides, PowerPoint presentations.
- Share "how-to" brochures we receive from utility companies (i.e. understanding your bill, read your meter, apply for energy assistance, conserve, weatherize, rebate programs).
- Provide assistance on how to file informal and formal complaints.
- Referrals

#### Safety and Quality of Service:

- ▶ Be Safe Around Electricity
- Natural Gas Safety
- ▶ Trees and Power Lines
- ▶ Call Before Digging "Dig Rite"
- If Service Is Disconnected
- Some Facts About The Cold Weather Rule
- Phone Lines: Where Does The Responsibility End
- Be Prepared In Case Of Emergency
- How To Check For Water Leaks
- Water Quality Issues

#### Press Releases:

- Commission decisions
- Hearing dates for cases before the PSC
- Setting of the intervention deadline in a case
- Consumer alerts-potential for high natural gas bills, telephone opt-out
- Distribute press releases to Capitol press corps
- Available on Commission website
- Various media outlets and consumer groups receive releases via our listserve

#### Media Contacts

Work with the state and national media on stories regarding activities at the Missouri Public Service Commission.

Visit various newspapers across the state (editorial board meetings) to inform them of Commission issues.

## Develop PSAs

Produce short public service announcements to help educate consumers.

These are sent to media for broadcast and posted on Commission website.

#### **PSC** Website

- Manage content of Commission website.
- Update information on a regular basis.
- Responsible for design of website.



**Manufactured Housing** Electric

**Natural Gas** 

Telecommunications

Water / Sewer

#### Home The Commissioners About the PSC Orders / Notices Agendas / Minutes EFIS / Case Filings Hearings & Rules Consumer Information File a Complaint

**Job Opportunities** 

Other Resources

Forms

#### Regulating Missouri's Investor-Owned Utilities

#### April Is National Safe Digging Month --Make The Call



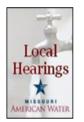
April is National Safe Digging Month and is dedicated to increasing awareness of safe digging practices across the country and to the national call-before-you-dig number.

→ Video row

# celebrate the three-year anniversary of 811,



#### Local Hearings Planned In Missouri-American Rate Case



The Missouri Public Service Commission will hold local public hearings to receive customer comments on a \$48.7 million rate increase request by Missouri-American Water Company.

→ Hearing Schedule

→ What Happens When A Rate Case Is Filed?



Qsearch











#### Increase consumer awareness of PSC:

- ➤ Educate consumers on PSC Electronic Filing and Information System (EFIS) so they can access information on cases.
- Webcast of Commission hearings, local public hearings and agenda.
- ➤ PowerPoint presentations which illustrate the Commission's role and functions as they relate to utilities in Missouri.
- Provide informational materials to the General Assembly as requested.

#### **Information Sheets**

- Cover a wide range of topics (establishing service, budget billing, deposits, Cold Weather Rule, energy conservation, safety).
- Appear on Commission website.
- Sent through our listserve to interested consumer groups.

#### Consumer Newsletters

- Quarterly publication providing articles on various utility related topics (ways to cut down on your heating bill, summer energy saving tips).
- Wide distribution list, over 1,200 of these are currently sent out to consumers and/or consumer groups.

#### PowerTOWN®

- A program designed to give school students information on how to be safe around electricity.
- Provides a visual display of what can happen when you come in contact with a power line.
- Informational materials on how to be safe around electricity.

#### State Fair Booth

- Provide information and answer consumer questions about issues related to the PSC.
- A wide variety of informational materials are available. Most contain the PSC Consumer Services hotline number and website.

#### **Publications**

- PSC Annual Report contains a great deal of information about the agency as well as its activities during the most recent fiscal year.
- Pamphlets on various subjects:
  - A Guide To Managing Your Utility Services
  - The PSC Cold Weather Rule
  - What You Should Know About Your Natural Gas Bill

## **Consumer Advisory Counsel**

The Office of the Public Counsel (OPC) was established in 1975 to represent the public and the interests of utility customers in proceedings before the Missouri Public Service Commission (PSC). The Office of the Public Counsel is independent from the PSC and has a separate budget and staff.

## **Consumer Advisory Counsel**

While OPC reviews all utility filings and issues considered by the PSC, the focus is utility rates and regulations proceedings that affect residential and small business customers.

OPC tries to help customers by contacting the utility or directing them to the appropriate PSC department or government agency.

## **Local Public Hearings**

#### Why have them:

- Consumers have an opportunity to present comments to PSC commissioners about the rate increase request.
- Commission receives information on billing and service related issues. PSC Staff follows up with consumers who testify.
- Educate consumers on the PSC and the rate case process.

## **Local Public Hearings**

#### **Information Session:**

- Open forum, less restrictive than local public hearing.
- ☐ Time given to have one-on-one conversations to get information.
- □ Consumer questions addressed by PSC Staff, Utility Personnel and Office of Public Counsel.
- Educate consumers on the PSC and the rate making process (PowerPoint Presentation, Fact Sheet, Information Sheets).

## **Local Public Hearings**

□ Consumers are encouraged to follow the case by reviewing case filings in EFIS and/or view hearings on PSC website.

#### **Public Comments**

□ Customers unable to attend public hearings and wish to make a comment may contact the PSC. Comments may also be registered in a case using the PSC's electronic filing and information system (EFIS). Customers can also submit comments to the Office of the Public Counsel.





## **Any Questions?**

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