

Consumer Issues



National
Association of
Regulatory
Utility
Commissioners

Ohio

**Public Utilities
Commission**

PUCO Consumer Hotline

- Assists residential and business consumers.
- Resolves disputes between consumers and utility companies.
- Receives contacts via a toll-free hotline, mail, email, fax, or walk-in.
- Informally contacts utility companies for facts about customers' concerns.

PUCO Consumer Hotline

- When staff receives a consumer complaint, all information must be documented in Contact Management System (CMS). Includes:
 - Customer demographics
 - Company name / issue code
 - Important details and facts noted to summarize the call
- Call is handled as an educational reference or investigation

| Educational Reference (provide information to customer) | Investigation (mediate disputes) |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify various options / solutions for customer, depending on the nature of the question or concern• Provide information on payment plans• Explain rules and regulations<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Disconnection Rules- Bill Format & Notice Requirements• Explain low income programs• Explain the Choice process for gas and electric industries | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• PUCO gathers facts about customer issue• Investigate issue by contacting utility, reviewing applicable rules, and evaluating the two sets of information• Possible result: customer account may be credited, or the situation may be corrected by the utility company• If informal process does not resolve issue, customer can have dispute heard before the PUCO through the formal complaint process |

Disconnection of Service

Residential Disconnection Process:

- The utility company must give at least 14 days notice prior to disconnection.
- The disconnection notice may be mailed separately or included on the regular monthly bill.
- Disconnection amount cannot be greater than the delinquent amount.

Disconnection of Service (cont.)

Additional **Ten Day** Winter Heating Season Notice Provision:

From November 1 – April 15

The utility company must make contact with the customer **ten days prior** to disconnection of service by personal contact, telephone, mail or hand delivered written notice.

Reconnection of Service

Reconnection of service after payment:

If service has been off for **less** than ten business days:

- Utility companies are required to restore service the same day if the payment is received prior to 12:30 p.m.
- If the payment is received after 12:30 p.m., the utility company has until the close of following business day to restore service.

Reconnection of Service (cont.)

Reconnection of service after payment:

If service has been off for **more** than ten business days:

- Utility companies can treat customer as a new customer and connect service per the electric service standards.
 - Electric – 99% within three business days to connect service
- Customers can also be charged a reconnection charge.

Billing

Customer bills shall be accurate and rendered at regular intervals, and contain clear and understandable form and language. Each bill shall state:

- 1) The customer's name, billing address, service address, and account number
- 2) The company's name and its payment address
- 3) The company's twenty-four hour local/toll-free number for reporting service emergencies
- 4) Contact information (phone number and/or address) for the company where the customer can ask questions
- 5) PUCO contact information to contact PUCO if dispute not resolved

Billing (cont.)

Electric bills must show:

- Generation component
- Transmission component
- Distribution component

12-month usage history

Bill Format

Information on bills may vary by industry, but generally all bills should contain:

- Dates of the service period covered by the bill
- The billing determinants applicable:
 - (a) Beginning meter reading
 - (b) Ending meter reading
 - (c) Demand meter reading
 - (d) Multiplier
 - (e) Consumption
 - (f) Demand

Bill Format (cont.)

- Identification of estimated bills
- Due date for payment
- Any late payment charge or gross and net charges, if applicable
- Any unpaid amounts due from previous bills, customer credits, and total amount due and payable
- Current balance of the account, if the residential customer is billed according to a budget plan
- Current gas and electric charges separately, if the customer is billed for gas and electric service on the same bill

Bill Format (cont.)

- Any nonrecurring charge
- Any payment(s) or credit(s) applied to the account during the current billing period
- If applicable, each charge for non-tariffed, non-regulated service (equipment protection plans)
- Percentage of income payment program Plus (PIPP Plus) billing information if applicable:
 - (a) Current PIPP Plus payment
 - (b) PIPP Plus payments defaulted (i.e., past due)
 - (c) Total PIPP Plus amount due
 - (d) Total account arrearage

Bill Format (cont.)

All utility bills must contain the following text regarding the PUCO:

If your complaint is not resolved after you have called your utility company, or for general utility information, residential and business customers may call the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) toll free at 1-800-686-7826 or for TDD/TTY toll free at 1-800-686-1570 from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. weekdays, or visit the PUCO website at www.PUCO.ohio.gov.

To change a bill format, the utility must receive PUCO approval.

Internet Billing

Utilities may issue bills through the Internet, however the following conditions apply:

- A customer cannot be required to use online billing;
- No enrollment or usage fees shall be assessed to a customer who chooses to receive bills and/or customer information online;
- The online billing statement shall include the same information explained previously;
- The site must be secure, encrypted and accessible only by the customer of record after completing a secure registration process;

Internet Billing (cont.)

- Any fees to accept online payments shall be clearly disclosed in payment window(s);
- Any payment made online shall be treated as a payment made at the company's business office. The time needed to post the payment to the account shall be clearly stated; and
- If a customer chooses to use online billing, the customer shall not be restricted to making payments online in the future. All payment methods shall continue to be available to the customer.

Customer Choice

- Promotes competition.
- Offers customer choice of supplier.
- Regulated company still maintains distribution system & handles billing.
- Suppliers certified by the PUCO to ensure managerial, financial & technical capabilities to provide the service.

Customer Choice (cont.)

Suppliers must:

- Provide consumers with sufficient information to make informed decisions;
- Protect consumers against deceptive, unfair and unconscionable acts and practices in marketing, solicitation and sales; and
- Provide customer contracts including terms and conditions.

Customer Choice (cont.)

Ohio offers an Apples to Apples comparison chart so customers can quickly compare current supplier offers.

- Charts are updated on a regular schedule.
- Information is available via PUCO web site and toll-free information line to request hard copy.
- Very popular consumer education piece.

Outreach

Provide information about participating in PUCO public hearings.

- Hearing notice is printed in local newspapers.
- Hearings are held both in the daytime and evenings.
- Consumer is “sworn in” prior to speaking & can be asked questions.

Speak to community organizations

- Target specific populations (senior citizens, low income, business groups).
- Attend community events to raise awareness.
- Staff members trained to speak to public.

Web Site

- Apples to Apples Chart
- Live viewing of PUCO Commission meetings
- Access to PUCO formal dockets
- Consumer brochures and information

Social Media

- The PUCO has a new social media presence on Facebook and Twitter.
- These platforms supplement the PUCO website, brochures, fact sheets and press releases and provide additional ways for stakeholders to be informed about the utility policy.
- Users can to stay up to date with the latest news and information surrounding Ohio's regulated utilities by “liking” www.facebook.com/PUCOOhio and following on Twitter at www.twitter.com/PUCOOhio.