



**The Public Utilities Regulatory Utility  
Commission of Ghana  
and  
The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio  
Partnership Program  
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# **Consumer Protections in a Regulatory Commission**



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# Overview of Presentation

- **Role of Service Monitoring and Enforcement Department (SMED)**
- **Consumer protections**
- **Tracking consumer data**
- **Complaint process**
- **Customer service audits**
- **Public hearing process**



# Role of Service Monitoring and Enforcement Department (SMED)

- **Investigation and Audit**
  - Performs customer service functions
- **Facilities and Operations**
  - Performs service quality and safety inspections
- **Reliability and Service Analysis**
  - Performs data analysis of customer complaints, field inspection records, customer surveys
- **Data Systems and Support**
  - Maintains the computers and databases for department



# Consumer Protections

- **Standard deposit procedures**
- **Standard bill format language**
- **Standard disconnection notice**
- **Basic service requirements**
- **Complaint procedures**

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# Standard Deposit Procedures

- **Creditworthiness**
- **Deposit amount**

OPUC



# **Standard Bill Format Requirements**

- **Customer Information**
- **Name of the utility company**
- **A statement of where customers may call if they have a complaint**
- **Billing determinants**
- **Amount owed**



# **Standard Disconnection Procedures**

- **Established guidelines under which a utility company may disconnect service**
- **Standard notice provisions**





# Disconnection Notice Requirements

- the delinquent billing account number
- the total amount required to prevent disconnection of the regulated services provided by the distribution utility
- any security deposit owed at the time of the notice
- earliest date when disconnection may occur
- a statement that the commission staff is available to render assistance with unresolved complaints



# Basic Service Requirements

- **Electric service and safety standards**
- **Minimum telephone service standards**
- **Water and Sewer rules**



# Complaints Procedures

- **Informal Complaint**
- **Formal Complaint**



# **Complaint Process (Informal)**

- **Contact the PUCO (Toll free number, E-mail, regular mail)**
- **Consumer inquiry record is created**
- **Contact is made with the company (Three-way call, or e-mail)**
- **Company response**
- **Notify customer of response**



# **Complaint Process (Formal)**

- **Complaint is assigned to an attorney examiner**
- **Pre-hearing settlement conference**
- **Hearing**
- **Commission decision**



# **Dispute Resolution Process**

- **Educate consumers of their rights**
- **Provide specific utility information**
- **Consumer consultation and referrals**
- **Mediate informal consumer complaints**



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# **What is needed to handle dispute resolutions**

- **An easy method for customers to reach the Commission**
- **An internal procedure to process each type of contact**
- **Authority over and a working relationship with the utility companies to facilitate complaint resolution**
- **To establish credibility with consumers**
- **Staff trained to handle complaints**



# Customer Service Audits

- **Data request sent to company**
- **On-site visits to companies' customer service centers**
- **Review bills, disconnection notices and tariff requirements**
- **Notify company of any non-compliance issues**





# Tracking Consumer Data

- **Establish consumer contact records**
- **Analyze consumer complaints and inquiries**
- **Service quality and safety inspection reports**
- **Survey responses from utility company consumer**



**PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF OHIO  
180 EAST BROAD STREET  
COLUMBUS, OHIO 43266-0573**

- **Complaint #:** 98-000040Investigation      **Investigator:** Goins
- **Case Status:** CLOSED CASE
- **Date Filed:** 8/3/98 11:28:12 AM      **Closed:** 8/3/98 11:33:02 AM
- **Entry Method:** TELEPHONE INQUIRIES
- **Customer Name:** SAM SMITH
- **Caller Name:**
- **Company Name:**
- **NIQ:** (737) 737-3737      **Ext.:**      **CBR:**      **Ext.:**
- **Email Address:** Smith@aol.com      **Fax Phone No.:**
- **Address:** 2323 ROAD AVE
- COLUMBUS OH      43215
- **County:** FRAN      FRANKLIN
- **Utility Company:** DPLB - DAYTON POWER & LIGHT-BOTH
- **Type:** GE (Gas and Electric)
- **Account Class:** Residential
- **Customer Contact:** CONNIE FISK
- **Paper File:** N
- **Close Codes:** BB - BACKBILLING



- CASE ACTIVITY
- 8/3/98 11:28:59 CASE INITIAL CASE DESCRIPTION
- CALLER CALLED FOR HER GRANDFATHER WHO MOVED TO TENNESSEE. DPL IS
- TRYING TO COLLECT \$472.00. THE CUSTOMER'S LAST STATEMENT WAS A CREDIT BALANCE. AT THE FINAL READ, DPL STATED THAT THE ELECTRIC METER WAS FAULTY AND BACKBILLED THE CUSTOMER FOR THE PAST 5 MONTHS. DPL STATES THAT THE CUSTOMER USED 6109 kWh OVER THAT PERIOD. THE CUSTOMER'S RECORD FROM LAST YEAR SHOW THAT HIS USE WAS ONLY 3900 kWh. THE CUSTOMER WAS GONE APPROXIMATELY 2 WKS/MONTH FOR THE MONTHS IN QUESTION.
- 8/4/98 8:12:23 FIRS FIRST COMPANY CONTACT
- COMPANY REVIEWED CUSTOMER'S ACCOUNT – USAGE WAS INCONSISTENT FOR ABOUT FIVE MONTHS PRIOR TO CUSTOMER CLOSING ACCOUNT. AFTER GETTING THE FINAL READ, THE COMPANY TESTED THE METER AND FOUND THAT IT WAS NOT REGISTERING ACCURATELY . COMPANY ESTIMATED THE CUSTOMER'S USAGE FOR THOSE 5 MONTHS BASED ON THE CUSTOMER'S PREVIOUS USAGE, EXPLAINED TO COMPANY THAT CUSTOMER WAS GONE APPROXIMATELY 2 WEEKS OUT OF EACH OF THE MONTHS IN QUESTION. COMPANY CONFIRMED THAT CUSTOMER'S USAGE FROM THE PREVIOUS YEAR WAS APPROXIMATELY 3900 kWh. COMPANY AGREED TO TAKE AN ADDITIONAL 20% FROM THE BILL TO ALLOW FOR THE FACT CUSTOMER WASN'T THERE.
- 8/5/98 3:04:45 CUST CUSTOMER CONTACTED
- EXPLAINED TO CUSTOMER THAT COMPANY WAS WILLING TO MAKE A GOOD WILL ADJUSMENT OF A REDUCTION OF 20% OF THE BILL. EXPLAINED THAT THE COMPANY CAN BACKBILL FOR USAGE IF IT DISCOVERS A METER TO NOT BE OPERATING ACCURATELY.
- 8/5/98 3:09:24 CLOS CLOSING CASE
- CLOSING CASE AFTER EXPLAINING CUSTOMER THEIR RIGHTS



# **Importance of Consumer Protections**

- **Ensure safety and reliability**
- **Ensure that customers have access to basic utility services**
- **Ensure that customers are treated equally**

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# For additional information

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