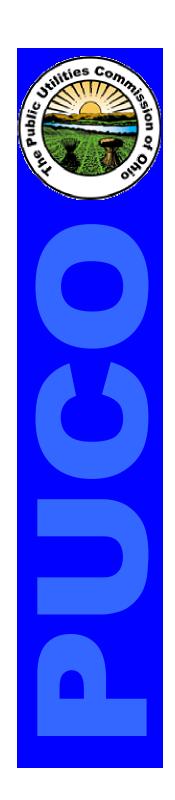


# The Public Utilities Regulatory Utility Commission of Ghana and The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio Partnership Program

April 11 – 15, 2005 Accra, Ghana

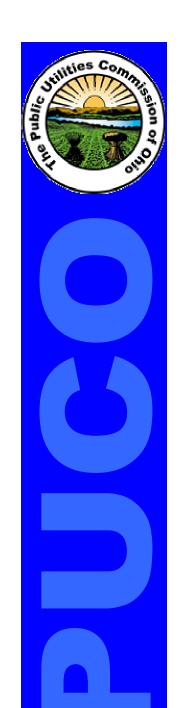
Conducted by the
National Association of Regulatory
Commissioners
Regulatory Partnership Program
Sponsored by:
US Agency for International
Development (USAID)



# Consumer Protections in a Regulatory Commission

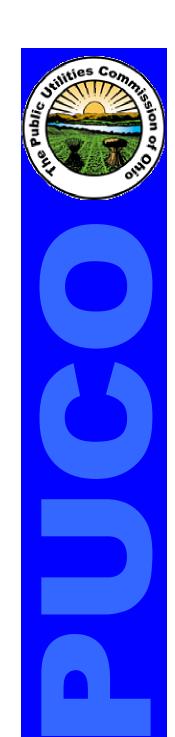


Tonja D. Goins Low Income Programs Specialist



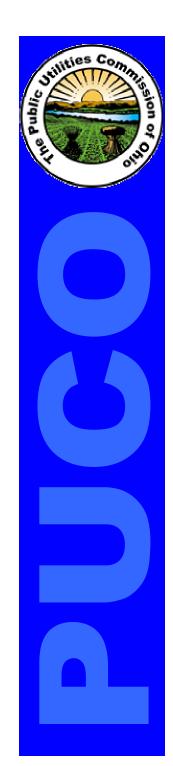
#### **Overview of Presentation**

- 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**

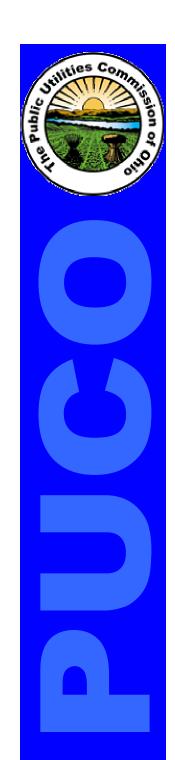
Standard deposit procedures

Standard bill format language

Standard disconnection notice

Basic service requirements

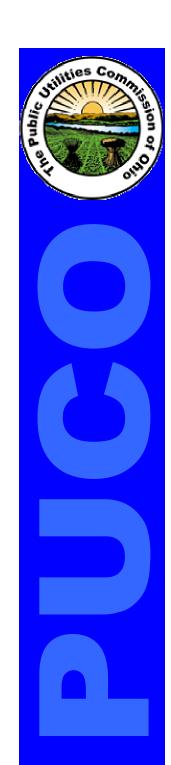
Complaint procedures



# **Standard Deposit Procedures**

Creditworthiness

• Deposit amount



### Standard Bill Format Requirements

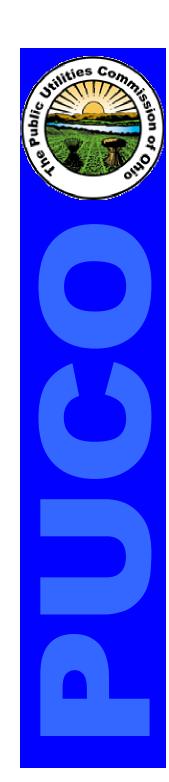
Customer Information

Name of the utility company

• A statement of where customers may call if they have a complaint

Billing determinants

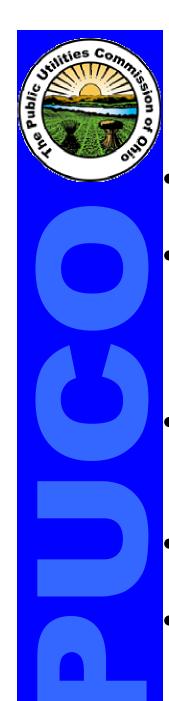
Amount owed



#### **Standard Disconnection Procedures**

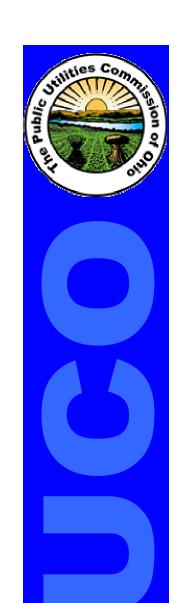
• Established guidelines under which a utility company may disconnect service

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

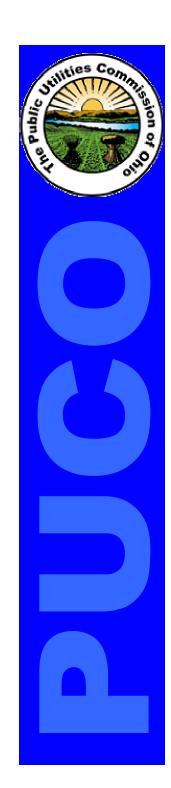


## **Basic Service Requirements**

• Electric service and safety standards

• Minimum telephone service standards

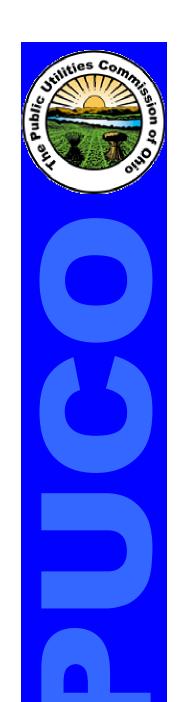
Water and Sewer rules



### **Complaints Procedures**

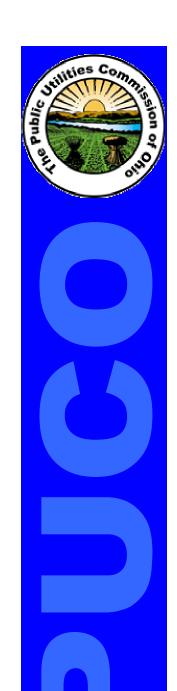
• Informal Complaint

• Formal Complaint



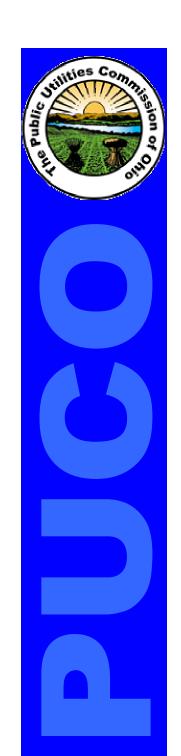
# **Complaint Process**(Informal)

- 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



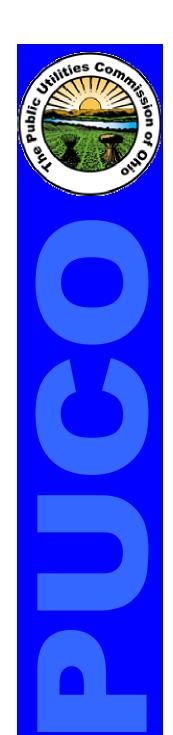
# **Complaint Process** (Formal)

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



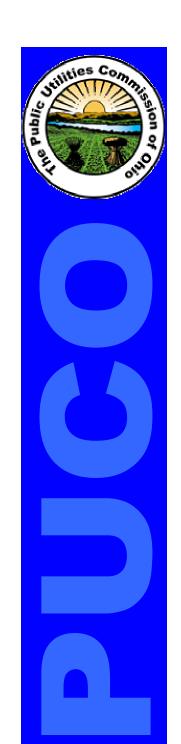
### **Dispute Resolution Process**

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



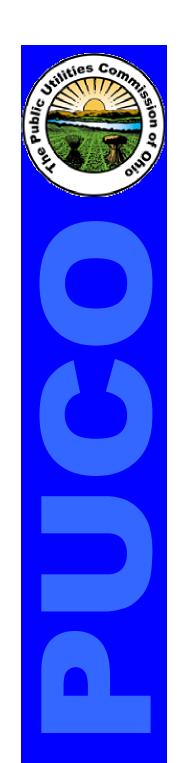
# What is needed to handle dispute resolutions

- 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



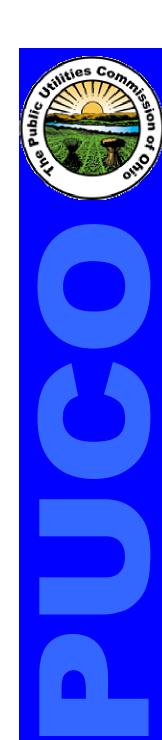
#### **Customer Service Audits**

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

 $\mathbf{AM}$ 

• 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

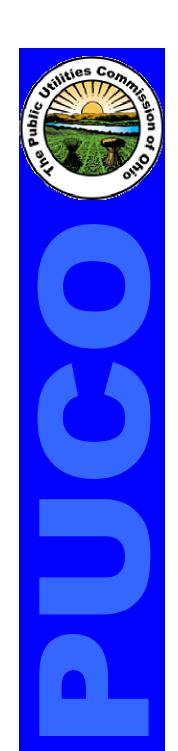
• Type: GE (Gas and Electric)

Account Class: Residential

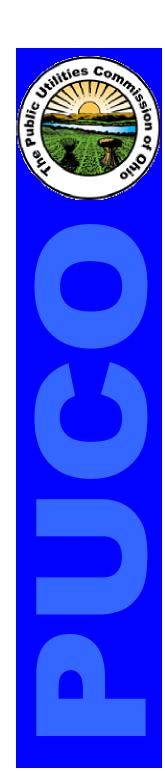
Customer Contact: CONNIE FISK

• 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



#### For additional information

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Columbus, Ohio 43215-3793
USA 614-466-0138

tonja.goins@puc.state.oh.us