

# CONSUMER PROTECTION AND SOCIAL ISSUES I

NARUC Energy Regulatory Partnership Program

The Public Services Regulatory Commission of Armenia  
and The Iowa Utilities Board



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# CUSTOMER SERVICE MISSION

- Assist customers in resolving issues with their utility service providers.
- Ensure that utilities treat customers according to the regulations.



# BACKGROUND DATA

- Average 7,000 customer contacts per year:
  - About half are customers merely trying to contact utility
  - About half are customers that have actual issues
  - Credit disconnections
  - Denied new service because of past due accounts balance
  - High bill complaints and/or billing errors
  - Service reliability problems
  - Telephone Slamming and Cramming
- Most customer issues result from a breakdown in communications between the customer and the utility, not any kind of rules violation.
- An objective is to try and get the customer and utility to work out their differences before IUB staff becomes involved.



# CUSTOMER INTERACTIONS

- Verbal:
  - Telephone calls to our office
  - Customers walk-in to our office
- Written:
  - Correspondence by postal mail
  - Correspondence by e-mail
  - Correspondence using Web site online complaint form



# COMPLAINT CLASSIFICATIONS

## **C-file:**

- "Informal" complaint process outlined in 199 IAC chapter 6.
- Usually a written complaint.
- Utility gets 20 days to respond.
- Staff proposes resolution.
- Office of Consumer Advocate may review and intervene.
- Any party has 14 days to request appeal of Resolution.
- Appeals may be heard before the Board or the Administrative Law Judge.



# Complaint Classifications cont ...

## **RC-file:**

- Ad-hoc process to assist customers in resolving complaints with utilities that are not under Board jurisdiction.
- Usually a written complaint from customer.
- Utility asked to investigate and respond to customer within 20 days and provide a copy to the Board.



# WITHIN CLASSIFICATIONS:

## COMPLAINTS TRACKED BY TYPES

Billing

Line Extension

Cramming

Meter Reading

EAS

Payment Arrangement

Delayed installation

Poor Customer Service

Deposit

Rates/Charges

Deregulated Services

Repairs

Directory Error

Slamming

Disconnect

Service Problem

Information Only

Other Call Type



# CONSUMER PROTECTIONS

- Winter Disconnection Moratorium
- 20 Degree Rule
- Health Rule
- Billing and Payment
- Bill Payment Agreements





# EXAMPLE 1

## Complaint:

Customer thought the utility billed for more electricity than she used based on comparing 2010 summer kWh use to 2009 summer kWh use.

Customer service representatives told her that it was not possible for her to use that much electricity.



# EXAMPLE 1

## Finding:

The summer of 2009 was one of the mildest summers in the last 30 years. It was common for electric bills in 2010 to be much higher than in 2009 because of air conditioning units working harder in 2010 to maintain thermostat settings.

Although there were several months of estimates, the April 2010 meter reading confirmed how much electricity was used over the winter. The 99.4 percent accuracy is well within the Board's acceptable range of accuracy (98 to 102 percent), per 199 IAC 19.4(13).

Staff does not find any indication that the customer was billed for more than the electricity used. The customer may establish a payment agreement by calling the utility.



# EXAMPLE 2

## Complaint:

The price of natural gas was high and the customer suspected the meter reading was wrong. Customer is unable to self read the meter.

Customer had to call the utility several times before obtaining desired results.

Representatives who promised to call the customer back did not do it.



# EXAMPLE 2

## Finding:

The utility acknowledged that the meter was read incorrectly and issued a corrected bill based on the reread. The corrected bill appears consistent with the prior month's bill.

An inaccurate meter reading resulting in a high bill, is usually offset by the next accurate meter reading resulting in a lower bill because a portion of the gas was billed the prior month. However, in this case, a corrected bill was issued based on a reread.

The utility identified the customer service coaching needs and followed through to prevent similar occurrences.



# EXAMPLE 3

## Complaint:

Customer provided our office with a written complaint. The customer stated his bills have been estimated a lot and this has resulted in higher monthly bills around \$200.

Before the company increased rates the bills were around \$140 per month.

The customer has taken steps to conserve energy use and has not seen a reduction in the bills.



# EXAMPLE 3

## Finding:

The utility must make an effort to read the customer meter on corresponding days of each meter-reading period, and if a reading cannot be obtained, the utility may render an estimated reading.

Board rules limit utilities to no more than three consecutive estimates. Based on a review, of the bills for the last 16 months the meter was only estimated twice.

A review of the billing for the last 16 months shows the kW hours used increased generally over the summer months. The price per kWh also increased during this time.

Staff found no evidence the increase in the customer's bills were a result the estimated meter readings.

Recommended the customer contact the utility to learn ways to reduce usage.



# QUESTIONS?



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