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Managing the Complaint Process

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Complaints Handling Process

- Informal complaints are handled by Investigators through the PUCO Hotline in the Service Monitoring and Enforcement Department.
 - Initiated by a phone call, e-mail, or letter
 - Mediated by Hotline Investigators
 - Nearly 80,000 contacts in 2006
- Formal complaints are handled by Attorney Examiners in the Legal Department.
 - Initiated with a formal complaint form
 - PUCO Attorney Examiners preside over the process
 - 135 formal complaints in 2006



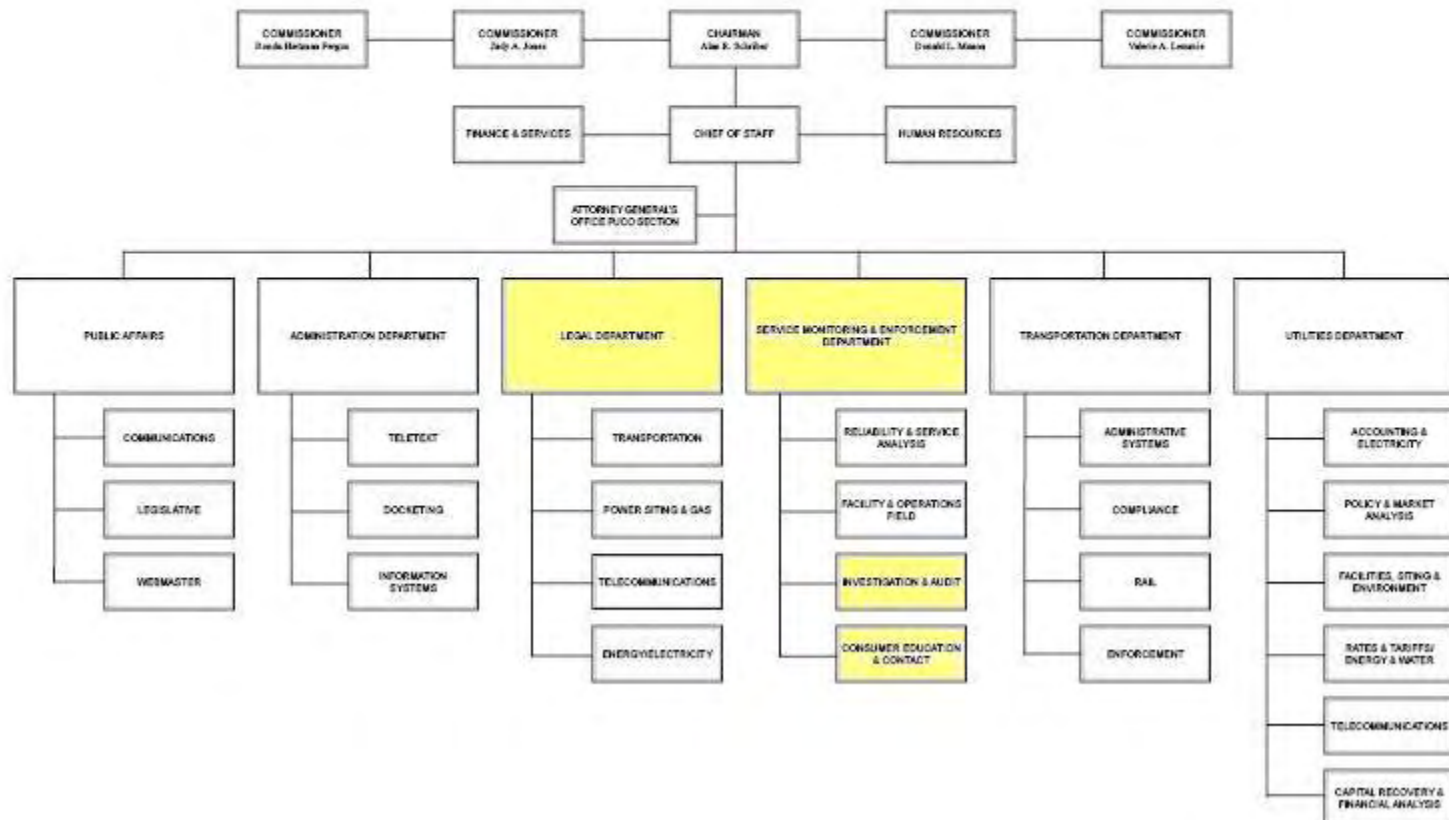


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The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio TABLE OF ORGANIZATION





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Informal Complaint

- Initial contact is made
- Record is created
- Provide the customer with information or a telephone number to escalate the complaint with the utility company
- PUCO Investigator contacts the company
- Company response
- Follow-up if needed
- Provide response to customer
- Complaints are usually resolved in a few days

Formal Complaint

- Complaint is filed
- Assigned to an Attorney Examiner
- Pre-hearing settlement conference
- Hearing (formal testimony from parties)
- Commission decision
- Company can file for rehearing within 30 days of the decision
- After rehearing, the company can appeal the decision before the Ohio Supreme Court
- It may take several months or more to resolve a formal complaint

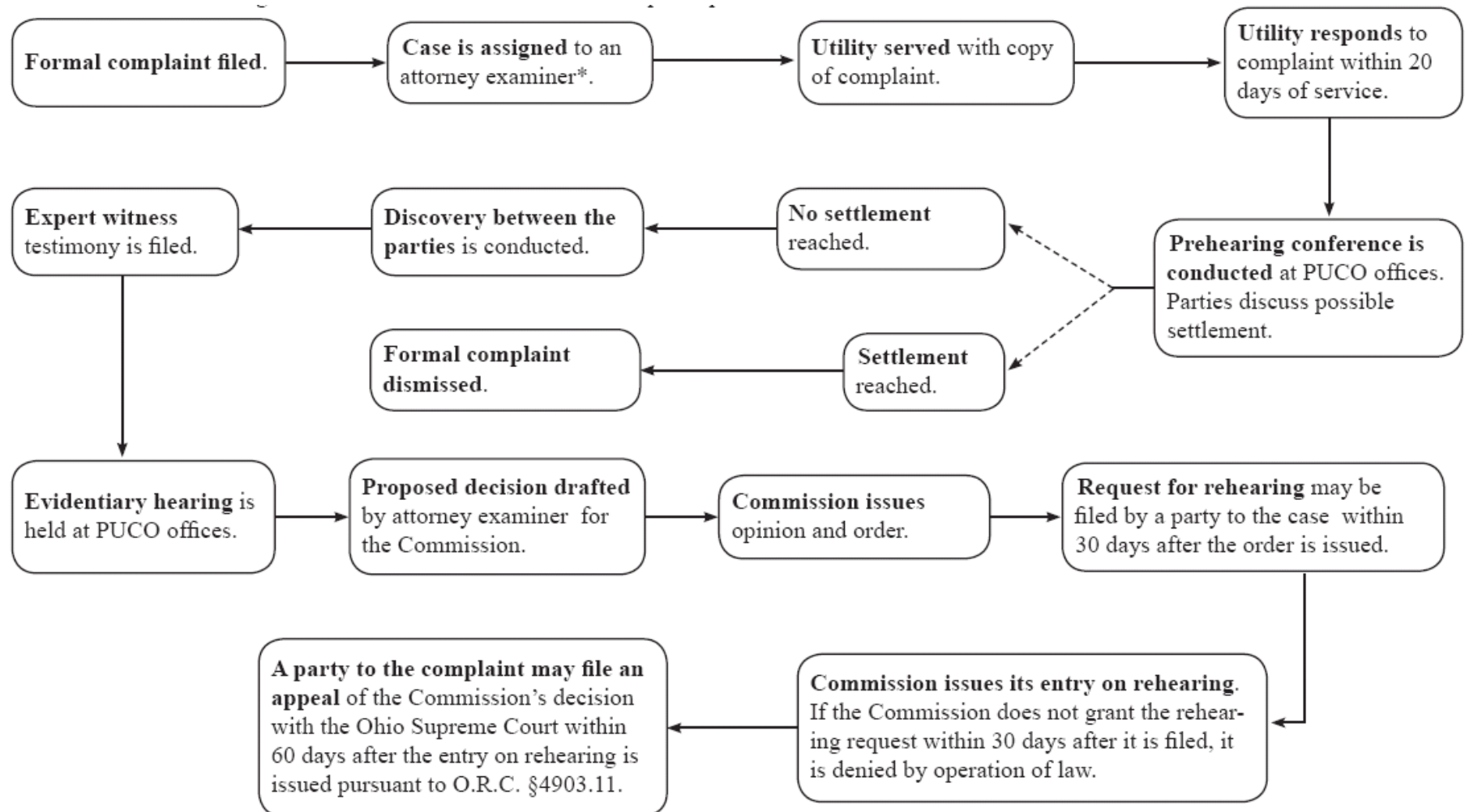


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Formal Complaint Process





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Alternative Dispute Resolution

- Encourage parties to go through informal (hotline) process first.
- If a formal complaint is warranted, an Attorney Examiner (AE) serves as a mediator during the pre-hearing/settlement conference (this is a different attorney than the one assigned to hear the case).
- During the pre-hearing the AE's job is to:
 - Clarify rules, explain the process, explain the burden of proof, provide options (settle or not settle), explain risks.
- As the mediator, PUCO AE's don't negotiate on behalf of either party.
- The Ohio Consumers' Counsel could represent individual parties before the Commission and negotiate on their behalf.



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Nature of Complaints

- Billing disputes
- Establishing service
- Service interruption and service problems
- Confusion or dislike for PUCO rules and company rules
- In need of financial assistance to pay utility bills





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Tracking Consumer Data – Informal Complaints

- All Informal Complaints are entered into our Contact Management System (CMS).
- The following information is entered into the CMS database for each contact/complaint:
 - Contact information (name, address, phone, etc.)
 - Company that the complaint/contact is about
 - A code indicating the reason for the call (i.e. billing dispute, service interruption, information request)
 - Detailed notes about the conversation and next steps
- The Investigator will continue to update the notes and tasks until the investigation is complete.
- Once the customer has received a final response, the Investigator will close the complaint.
- All calls are recorded for quality control purposes.



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Tracking Consumer Data – Informal Complaints

- The coding system allows us to track trends and identify potential problem areas.
- Standard reports are generated on a monthly basis (or more often if needed).
 - Contacts per company (ie. 86 contacts regarded Columbia Gas of Ohio).
 - Contacts per code (ie. 36 billing disputes).
 - Individual company contacts by code (i.e. Columbia Gas had 48 billing dispute contacts, American Electric power had 36 billing dispute contacts).
- Comparison reports are also generated on a regular basis (comparing contacts regarding company “A” and company “B”).
- Special reports can be generated when needed.
- Individual company responses to a complaint may illustrate a companywide violation of inappropriate regulatory policy citations.





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Tracking Consumer Data – Formal Complaints

– Docketing Information System

- All cases are assigned a case number (ex. 07-112-GA-COI).
- The first two numbers represent the year the case was filed, the next set of numbers are sequentially assigned, the next two letters represent the industry (ie. GA for Gas, EL for Electric), and the last three letters represent the code (ie. COI for Commission Ordered Investigation).
- All case related information can be accessed through our Web site: www.PUCO.ohio.gov.



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DIS - Docketing Information System - Windows Internet Explorer

http://dis.puc.state.oh.us/

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help

DIS - Docketing Information System

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The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio

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Customer Service Rules

- Minimum Gas Service Standards (MGSS)
 - The MGSS apply to both residential and nonresidential natural gas service customers.
 - There are 11 Sections in the MGSS.
 - We also have minimum standards for telephone and electric service.



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1. Retention of records and access to records and business activities.
 - Each company must have available for auditing and inspection all property and equipment.
 - Each company must maintain records for at least 3 years.
2. Metering
 - Service must be metered unless impractical (street lighting) and customers must provide company access to the meter.
 - Customer can request a meter test and the company must maintain certain meter test records.
3. Minimum customer service levels
 - Requirements for timely service initiation and/or upgrades.
 - 90 second average answer time for the customer hotline.
 - 4 hour window for scheduled appointments.



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MGSS

4. Provision of customer rights and obligations
 - Each company must provide new customers (and existing customers upon request) information about complaint procedures, rate information, gas choice, actual meter readings, privacy rights, etc.
5. Employee identification
 - A company employee seeking to access a customer's premises shall provide photo identification and state the reason for the visit.
6. Standards specific to the provision of small commercial gas service
 - Small Commercial = a commercial customer that uses less than 500,000 cubic feet of natural gas per year at a single location in the state or consumes gas at less than 3 locations.
 - Addresses standards involving creditworthiness, deposits, bases for denial or disconnection, notice requirements and reconnection for small commercial customers.



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MGSS

7. Fraudulent practice, tampering, and theft of service
 - Company must have an antitheft and antitampering plan.
 - Company can disconnect service if a customer tampers with equipment (the meter will be tagged and sealed and a notice will be hand delivered to the customer).
 - Customer must contest the allegations or pay for unmetered service before being reconnected.
8. Complaints and complaint-handling procedures
 - Company must provide a status report within three business days of receiving a complaint, if the complaint is not resolved in ten business days, the company must provide status reports every five days (to the PUCO Hotline and/or customer).
9. Customer billing and payments
 - Specifies information that should appear on customer bill, payment methods, due dates, and partial payments.
 - Recovery of undercharges must be spread over the length of the undercharge time period.



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10. Consumer safeguards and information

- Company must list an emergency 24-hour number in the local phone directory.
- PUCO Staff can review informational materials produced by the company.
- Company should not participate in unfair and deceptive acts.
- Upon request, company must provide customer with 12 month usage history and 24 month payment history.

11. Uniform system of accounts for gas companies

- Company must keep books of accounts and records in accordance with the uniform system of accounts as prescribed by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.



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Enforcement Options

- Work with the company informally
 - Send company an enforcement letter
 - Enter a voluntary stipulation
 - Direct the company to issue customer credits or refunds
 - Direct the company to pay forfeitures (fines)
 - Request a Commission Ordered Investigation (COI)
- All enforcement actions are handled in by enforcement staff in our Service Monitoring Department.



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Typical Informal Enforcement Process

1. Identify a possible violation via complaint or audit.
2. Verify the violation by checking the facts and the rule.
3. Draft an enforcement letter for review by staff attorney.
4. Send the enforcement letter to the utility company.
5. Review the utility's compliance plan for effectiveness and timeliness (they should remedy the problem/rule violation in a timely manner).



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Contents of a Rule Violation Letter

- Statement of probable non-compliance
- Description of the utility's action
- Statement of the rule that was violated
- Request for the utility's plans and schedule for coming into compliance
- Statement of due-date for responding to the letter



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Enforcement Tools

- Violation Database
 - Company
 - Rule Number
 - Date of Enforcement
- Forfeiture Assessment Considerations
 - Nature and circumstances of violation
 - Extent and gravity
 - Culpability
 - History of prior offense





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Commission Ordered Investigation (COI)

- Staff informally investigates issues, informs Commission of its findings, and recommends formal investigation.
- Commission opens COI case by issuing entry that informs Company of allegations.
- Company must respond to allegations.
- Company must respond to discovery requests.
- All information is made public through the docketing system.
- Interested parties can intervene in the investigation (i.e. the Consumers Counsel, other utility companies and consumer groups).
- Pre-hearings and formal hearings are held if needed.
- The COI will end with a Commission decision.