



STATE ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION

WORKING WITH CONSUMERS

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State Energy Regulatory Commission**

March 1 - 5, 2004
USA



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LEGAL FRAMEWORK

In line with the Energy Act, the Commission:

- Makes publicly known the policies and practices in implementing its regulations as well as the reasons for any changes thereto, using for the purpose the Commission's newsletter or other appropriate vehicles**
- Works in partnership with persons/entities representing and protecting consumer interests**
- Ensures that energy enterprises abide by the conditions of their licenses - rules for dealing with consumers, General Terms of Sale, etc.**



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GUIDING PRINCIPLES IN SERC's WORK

- **Ensure:**

- a balance between the interests of energy enterprises and those of consumers
- equality between various categories of energy enterprises and consumer groups
- that there is no restriction or distortion of competition in the energy market
- incentives for developing a competitive market for some activities in the energy sector, wherever appropriate conditions exist



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FACTORS FOR SUCCESSFUL WORKING WITH ENERGY COMPANIES AND CONSUMERS

- **Establish conditions for appropriate internal communication within the Commission:**
 - LAN and reliable data protection
 - Document tracking system
 - Dedicated in-house database
- **Ensure efficient external communications**
 - Approved and tested procedures for receiving and delivering information
 - Public Relations unit
 - Website with visitor feedback facility
 - Dedicated unit for working with consumers
 - Complaint filing and processing system



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INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

- **All PCs connected to a functioning Local Area Network (LAN)**
- **Access to legal database and Internet available to all users**
- **A functioning Intranet site with exhaustive information about licensed energy companies**



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PROTECTING THE COMMISSION'S NETWORK FROM UNAUTHORIZED ACCESS

- Existing database protection guaranteed at the required level, dynamic access control ensured by means of firewall
- Geographic Information System installed
- Document tracking system *Archimedes* used to control document flows



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EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

- **Approved procedures for provision of information to interested organizations, businesses and citizens**
 - Complaints accepted from both natural and legal persons
 - Visiting hours reserved for companies and individuals
 - Public consultations arranged to discuss draft regulations, rules, methodologies, etc.
 - Some meetings open to all natural or legal persons concerned



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- **Commissioners and experts:**

- Hold meetings with press to ensure more transparency in their work and decision-making process
- Take part in various media events – news emissions and dedicated radio/TV programs
- Explain to journalists all issues arising in the course of the Regulator's work – issuance of licenses, calls for tenders, processing of applications, etc.



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- **In cooperation with MATRA – a program sponsored by the Dutch Government – and the National Association of Bulgarian Consumers, printed materials have been developed to clarify the following issues:**
 - **Consumer Protection** – legal and sociological aspects of consumer protection
 - **Resolution of consumer disputes** – negotiations with utility, reconciliation procedure, collective protection of consumer rights and interests
 - **Consumer contracts** – contracts based on General Terms, how can a consumer prove his/her rights



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- Website - www.dker.bg

- Updated information about the Commission's activities, decisions and scheduled public meetings
- Register of all licenses and permits issued
- Sector-specific information
- SERC newsletter, also published on hard copy
- Consumer complaints accepted via e-mail



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NATIONWIDE PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

SERC closely cooperates with:

- **Trade & Consumer Protection Commission**
- **Labor unions countrywide**
- **Consumer associations**
- **Government and Non-Government organizations in the energy sector**
- **Cooperation Agreement signed with the Commission on Protection of Competition**

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PENDING TASKS

- **Set up a dedicated unit for working with consumers and filing of complaints**
- **Reduce complaint processing times**
- **Finalize SERC Website in English**



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PROSPECTS FOR IMPROVING CONSUMER PROTECTION AND AWARENESS

- **Raise consumer awareness as regards existing protective and impact mechanisms available to the regulatory authority**
 - Design and implement broader educational campaigns and public discussions with opinion leaders on topical issues of the energy sector
- **Implement good regulatory practices and international experiences**
 - Arrange specialized workshops and training sessions for SERC professional staff



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THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION