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National
Association of
Regulatory
Utility
Commissioners

Enhancing Consumer Interface

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Educating the Public about Safety and Quality of Service

- Consumer outreach
 - Brochures and fact sheets (Electric and Natural Gas Bill of Rights).
 - Speaking engagements and participation in fairs and trade shows.
 - The PUCO web-site, www.PUCO.ohio.gov.
 - In some cases we formally require the utility company to do consumer outreach/education.
- Bill messages
 - Contact information for the PUCO and the Ohio Consumers' Counsel appears on all utility bills.
- Require companies to mark equipment with special signage.
- Ohio Utility Protection Service
 - “Call Before You Dig” Law
 - Free service that will mark underground utility lines on a customers property before they dig for projects like installing a fence, building a garage, etc.
 - 8-1-1 national dialing implemented in 2007.
- Public Service Announcements (PSA's)
 - Many companies produce PSA's for radio and TV informing customers about safety issues (i.e. don't play near electric power lines).





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Obligation to Comply with Performance Standards

- The Minimum Gas Service Standards and Electric Service and Safety Standards provide the minimum level of acceptable performance standards that each company must follow.
- When PUCO staff becomes aware of repeated violations they will generally try to resolve the problem informally. If no agreement is reached they will draft the enforcement letter and proceed with the enforcement procedure.
- All regulated companies must follow these standards or risk being fined, risk other financial consequences, or risk losing their certificate to operate in the state of Ohio.



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Obligation to Pay Compensation for Non-Compliance

- All regulated companies must follow these standards.
- If a fine, refund, or any other relief is ordered by the Commission the company must comply within the stated time frame.
 - Failure to comply could result in the company losing their certificate to operate in the state of Ohio and being turned over to Ohio Attorney General for further legal action.



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Method of Payment of Compensation

- Compensation can be applied as the following:
 - Refunds to customers.
 - Funding for special programs.
 - Civil forfeitures (fines)
 - All fine money goes into the state of Ohio's *General Revenue Fund*.
 - Contributions of a certain dollar amount towards fixing the problem in question.
 - Funding for customer education and outreach programs.



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Encouraging Conservation

- Home Weatherization Program
 - Managed by the Ohio Department of Development.
 - Provides education and funding to help low-income households lower energy usage.
 - Services include insulation, air leakage reduction, heating system repairs or replacements, and health and safety testing and inspections.
- EnergyStar® Program
 - Appliances will earn the EnergyStar logo if they meet strict energy efficiency guidelines set by the Environmental Protection Agency and US Department of Energy.
- Energy efficiency education material





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Affordability Concerns

- Affordable access to natural gas and electricity is critical for Ohioans all year.
 - Below freezing temperatures in the winter
 - Near 100° temperatures in the summer
- We have assistance programs in place to help low-income customers.
- We have special payment plans in place to help all customers regardless of their income level.
- When considering rate adjustments and other policy decisions, the Commission considers the financial impact for customers and examines ways to minimize/offset that impact.



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Assistance Programs – Income Based

- Home Energy Assistance Plan (HEAP)
 - HEAP issues a one-time payment of up to \$175 for income eligible customers.
 - Income Requirements (175 percent of poverty guidelines).
 - \$35,000 = maximum annual income for a household of four.
- Emergency HEAP/Winter Crisis Program
 - One-time payment of up to \$175 for income eligible customers.
 - Customer must be in disconnect status.
- Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP)
 - PIPP allows customers to make more affordable energy payments.
 - 10 percent of gross monthly income for primary heating source, 5 percent of gross monthly income for secondary heating source.
 - Income Requirements (150 percent of poverty guidelines).
 - \$30,000 = maximum annual income for a household of four.
- Heat Share
 - Administered by the Salvation Army to help qualifying households pay natural gas bills.
 - Program typically runs from January to May, or until funding is depleted, and qualifications and aid vary by company.



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Assistance Programs – Not Income Based

- Budget Payment Plan
 - Allows customers to spread the cost of utility service over a 12 month period.
 - Same payment each month with true-up once per year.
- Winter Reconnect Program
 - Issued by PUCO on an annual basis with no income requirements.
 - Customers pay \$175 or the amount owed, whichever is less, and a \$20 reconnect fee to prevent disconnection of natural gas or electric service or restore service that has been disconnected.
 - Customers are set up on a payment plan after using the Winter Reconnect.
- The Patriot Plan
 - Under the plan, Ohio's natural gas and electric utilities cannot disconnect for nonpayment of the residential utility service of any military reservist or National Guardsman deployed on active duty.
 - Upon return from active duty, utilities must offer customers a period of time equal to the length of their deployment to pay any arrearages that may have accumulated.
- 1/3 and 1/6 Payment plans
 - Pay current bill plus 1/6 of arrearage.
 - Pay 1/3 of total balance.



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Prepaid Metering

Electric Service

- Prepaid service was proposed years ago that included a true-up period. This was not approved by the Commission.
- Demand Response.

Natural Gas Service

- No prepaid metering in Ohio, however, some budget customers get ahead in the off season and prepay for service.

