

The REGULATOR

Newsletter of the Office of Utilities Regulation

Vol. 1, No. 2

July - December 2003

CONSUMERS BUT NOT CUSTOMERS

by: J. Paul Morgan, Director General

"All customers are consumers - not all consumers are customers; we want to make all consumers our customers."

This comment made by a National Water Commission (NWC) Manager a few years ago has always stuck with me, because it truly describes a problem which all our utility service providers face.

The Jamaica Public Service Company Limited (JPS) and the NWC in particular are wrestling with the problem of controlling access to their networks so that it is only the legitimate consumers (those with whom they have contractual arrangements), who enjoy the benefits of the services offered.

The major problem we are looking at here, plainly speaking is THEFT. THEFT of electricity and THEFT of water.

The OUR's mission is not only to protect the interest of the consumer but also to ensure that utility companies have the opportunity to realize a reasonable return on their investment.

It is a delicate balancing act, but we believe that if we can facilitate an environment where the utility companies can operate at optimal efficiency then we will be fulfilling our mandate of serving the best interest of the consumer. Bear in mind that it is only out of an efficiently run utility that quality service and low prices can be realized.

However the OUR has to be satisfied that the companies are making sufficient effort to reduce losses because of the direct impact on the bottom line and therefore the level of future tariffs.

Let us also recognize that illegal consumers of utility services are to be found uptown equally as well as downtown, and that ultimately the legitimate customers will pay for the services received by the others, because in the final analysis some one must pay.

I am therefore encouraging all legitimate customers of the utility companies to support as vocally as possible, the efforts of JPS and NWC to reduce and eradicate losses due to theft.

Resources expended on reducing theft would surely be better spent on improving service.

Lost revenues due to theft totaling an estimated two billion dollars could be used very effectively to either improve service or reduce rates.

Also Inside This Issue

- How the Complaint Process Works
- Energy Tips
- FAQS

OUR
OFFICE OF UTILITIES
REGULATION

Working for better Utility Services

Staff

Members of The Office

J. Paul Morgan - Director General
C. Courtney Jackson - Deputy Director General, Telecommunications

Senior Managers

Maurice Charvis - Director, Analysis and Research
Antoinette Stewart - Director, Consumer Affairs
George Wilson - General Counsel
Eileen Salmon - Director, Corporate Affairs
Carolyn B. Young - Director, Admin./HRD
David Geddes - Manager, Communication Services

Editorial Team

• **David Geddes** • **Dwight McKenzie** •

Graphic Design

• **Dynamic Images** •

CONSUMERS BUT NOT CUSTOMERS

By J. Paul Morgan - *Director General*
contd. from pg. 1

We each therefore have a vested interest in seeing that the utility companies succeed in their efforts to reduce theft. After all if they do not succeed, we all will have to pay more.

We need to start a movement of change, just as we demand good service from the utility companies, we must demand of consumers honesty and responsibility in meeting their obligation to the companies.

If we do this we will be taking a major step forward in securing improvements in utility service.

The Complaints Process

By **Dwight McKenzie** and **David Geddes**

The Consumer Affairs Department (CAD) is the investigative arm of the Office of Utilities Regulation (OUR). It is charged with resolving complaints through a thorough, objective and transparent process.

Before referring a matter to the OUR, consumers should first lodge a complaint with the respective utility company. This can be done by contacting the relevant branch office or the utility's head office and speaking with a Customer Service representative or a senior officer.

The hearing of grievances by utilities is a consumer right and utilities are obliged to review such matters with a view to having them resolved.

If the complaint cannot or is not resolved by the utility company, the matter may then be referred to the OUR through the CAD.

Once a matter is referred to the CAD, the consumer is required to provide the department with certain basic information such as the specifics of the complaint, why they were not satisfied with the utility's initial response to the complaint and why it was not resolved.

The provision of all relevant documentation and any related correspondence between the consumer and the utility company assists the CAD in making speedy case determinations. Once a consumer has been informed that more information is needed, in order to conduct a comprehensive review of the complaint, he or she then has twenty (20) business days within which to provide the requested information.

When a matter has been accepted for investigation, the consumer is advised by way of an Acknowledgement Letter. The CAD will endeavour to complete its investigation within forty (40) business days.

THE COMPLAINTS PROCESS

By Dwight McKenzie and David Geddes

Cont. from pg 2

The Case Officer assigned to investigate the complaint will write to the utility company inviting them to respond and address particular issues especially if a breach of the utility's "Terms and Conditions" might have occurred. Utility companies have five (5) business days to acknowledge receipt of a Case Letter and thirty (30) business days to respond to it in writing.

Depending on the nature of the complaint a site inspection might be carried out by the CAD Case Officer (s) in order to obtain primary first hand information.

The next stage of the investigation involves objective evaluation and analyses by CAD of all information provided. Once this analysis is complete, CAD advises both the consumer and utility company of its final position in the matter by way of a Final Letter.

It should also be noted that the OUR has negotiated Guaranteed Standards/Quality of Service Measures to which it holds the National Water Commission (NWC) and the Jamaica Public Service Company Limited (JPSCO) accountable.

Once it is determined that a breach of these standards has occurred, the consumer is encouraged to claim direct compensation from the respective utility company.

ENERGY

Saving Tips



If you cook with electricity, turn off the burners on your stove several minutes before completing the allotted cooking time.

For lighting, use Compact Fluorescent Lamps instead of regular (incandescent) bulbs. These lamps last ten times longer and give the same amount of light, yet only use a quarter of the energy when compared with incandescent bulbs.



Ask the OUR

FAQS

Q. IF I RECEIVE POOR SERVICE FROM A UTILITY PROVIDER, WHAT SHOULD I DO ?

A. All utility companies have a procedure for dealing with customer complaints. If you have a complaint about a provider you should first speak or write to the company about the matter . If after following the company's complaint procedure you are still not satisfied or if the utility does not respond to your complaint, you may ask the OUR to investigate the matter.

OUR's Role

The Office of Utilities Regulation Act of 1995 established the Office of Utilities Regulation (the Office/OUR) as a body corporate. Under the Act, the OUR is charged with the responsibility of regulating the provision of utility services in the following sectors:

Electricity
Telecommunications
Water
Sewerage
Public transportation by road, rail and ferry.

The second schedule of the Act defines the constitution of the Office as follows:

"The Office shall consist of the Director General and such number of Deputy Directors General as may be appointed pursuant to this schedule".

The OUR receives and reviews applications for licenses and rate increases from the utility providers and investigates possible breaches, taking enforcement action where appropriate.

The OUR investigates complaints against utility companies, after they have been raised with the respective company. This is done at no charge to the consumer.

Objectives

- To ensure that consumers of utility services enjoy an acceptable quality of service at reasonable cost.
- To establish and maintain transparent, consistent and objective rules for the regulation of utility service providers.
- To promote the long-term efficient provision of utility services for national development consistent with Government's policy.
- To provide an avenue of appeal for consumers who have grievances with the utility service providers.
- To work with other related agencies in the promotion of a sustainable environment.
- To act independently and impartially.

If you have received unsatisfactory service from a utility company (electricity, water, telephone), you may be entitled to a compensatory payment from the respective company. Contact the Consumer Affairs Department of the OUR or fill out a complaint form available at post offices islandwide.

Contact

3rd floor PCJ Resource Centre
36 Trafalgar Road, Kingston 10,
Tel: (876) 929-6672, 968-6053-4,
968-6057-8.
Toll free 1888-991-2209
Fax: 929-3635.
E-mail: consumer@our.org.jm
Website address: www.our.org.jm

If you have questions about the role of The OUR or would like us to speak at any Community, Church or Citizens Association meetings,
Contact: David Geddes, Communication Services Manager. Email: dgeddes@our.org.jm
3rd Floor PCJ Resource Centre, 36 Trafalgar Road Kingston 10