

OUR sees 29% Customer Contact Increase

(KINGSTON, Jamaica; 2016 March 17): There was an increase in the number of consumers making contact with the Office of Utilities Regulation's (OUR's) Consumer Affairs Unit during the October to December 2015 quarter, compared to the previous quarter. The contacts to the Unit represent a sample of the utility customer complaints from service providers.

Data from the OUR's latest Quarterly Performance Report reveal that the Consumer Affairs Unit received 843 new contacts from customers of utility companies. This represents a 29% increase over the preceding quarter. It was also the highest number of contacts received for any quarter during 2015. The increase can be attributed to the continued uptick in service interruption complaints compared with previous reporting periods.

The Jamaica Public Service Company (JPS) received the highest number of contacts at 244 (29%), followed by the National Water Commission (NWC) – 219 (26%), C&WJ Ltd. (FLOW) – 189 (22%), Columbus Communications (FLOW) – 115 (14%), and Digicel – 38 (4%).

Small water providers CanCara Development Ltd., Dynamic Environmental Management Ltd. (DEML), Runaway Bay Water Company and the National Irrigation Commission; small telecommunications provider Dekal Wireless and OUR/Other (Not Utility Provider Related) account for the remaining 38 (4%) of contacts made.

The main reasons for utility customers contacting the OUR's Consumer Affairs Unit related to matters of: billing, service interruption, disconnection, the Guaranteed Standards, poor service quality and equipment damage.

Forty four percent (44%) of the total contacts made to the OUR during this quarter related to billing matters. The billing issues complained about included adjustments that were applied to customers' accounts, high consumption, disputed charges and estimated billing. There were 370 billing complaints, of which JPS and NWC accounted for the majority.

Service interruption issues represented 22% of total contacts for the review period. C&WJ (FLOW) and Columbus Communications (FLOW) accounted for the largest number of service interruption complaints by customers.

For the October to December 2015 period, over \$1.8- million was secured for utility customers as a result of OUR's investigations into their appeals. JPS and NWC accounted for 38% and 62% of total credits respectively. This brings to approximately \$10.8-million, the total sum secured for utility customer in 2015. Of this total, JPS accounted for 82% while the NWC accounted for the remaining 18%.

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The full copy of the OUR's Quarterly Performance Report (October-December 2015), can be found on the OUR's website: www.our.org.jm.

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BACKGROUND

The Intent and Purpose of the Quarterly Performance Report

The Quarterly Performance Report (QPR) is prepared by the Consumer Affairs Unit (CAU) and provides the public with information and analysis about the contacts received from utility providers. The information includes: The number of customer contacts received over the review period; JPS and NWC's performance against the guaranteed standards; utilities' responsiveness to our appeals process; and the performance of the Unit against the appeals process timelines.

The QPR is intended to be a fair, reasonable and transparent report of the above-mentioned activities. The statistics for each reporting period is gathered from our Customer Information Database and is reflective of the contacts received from utility consumers island-wide. These contacts are received via various channels, namely: letters, telephone, walk-in, e-mails, fax and social media.

The methods of calculation used include: summation; quarterly and year-on-year comparisons. The resort latterly to normalize the numbers of contacts by expressing this as per the customer base reflects our allowance for fair comparisons. Consequently the report cites the number of contacts per 100,000 of the service provider's customer base. Even so, it is recognized that the telecommunications sector with its heterogenous customer bases presents a peculiarity for comparison with the water and electricity utilities that have more homogenous customer bases. The information should be interpreted as a sample, or statistical representation of the intake to the Unit.

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