

Utility Customers leave Millions Unclaimed at JPS, NWC

(KINGSTON, Jamaica; 2016 March 17): Millions of dollars remain unclaimed by Jamaica Public Service Company Ltd (JPS) and the National Water Commission (NWC) customers who continue to neglect to claim for breaches of the Guaranteed Service Standards.

The latest Office of Utilities Regulation's (OUR) Quarterly Performance Report for October – December 2015 shows the low actual pay-out to customers by the NWC and JPS, compared to potential compensation.

The NWC's Guaranteed Standards compliance report for the quarter showed that seven hundred and seven (707) breaches were committed during the reporting period. These breaches had a potential pay-out of approximately \$2.18 million; however, only \$559,641.84 (representing 26%) was actually credited to affected customers' accounts.

For the calendar year 2015, the NWC committed a total of 2,827 breaches of the Guaranteed Standards with a potential pay-out of approximately \$8.76 million. However, the actual payments amounted to approximately \$2.6 million, which represents 30% of total potential payments made for the year.

The standards with the highest incidents of breaches over the reporting period and throughout 2015 related to the NWC's investigation into customers' complaints. This represented 61% of total breaches over the reporting period and 56% for the year.

JPS' Guaranteed Standards Compliance Report identified that it committed 28,255 breaches with a potential pay-out of approximately \$53.3 million for the October-December 2015 period. Actual pay-outs amounted to approximately \$15.7 million, representing 29% of total payments with 98% of these payments being by way of automatic compensation.

While data were not available for JPS for the 2015 calendar year, during the June to December period, the JPS said it committed a total of 68,838 breaches which had a potential pay-out of approximately \$132.6 million. Actual payments amounted to approximately \$36 million which represented 27% of total potential payments.

Sending its customers more than two consecutive estimated bills, at 73% during the reporting period and 67% during the June to December period, accounted for the highest incidents of breaches for the JPS.

OUR's Director of Consumer and Public Affairs, Mrs. Yvonne Nicholson, says she's disappointed with the continued unwillingness of consumers to hold their utility providers accountable. "The OUR has started a phased conversion of all JPS' Guaranteed Standards to automatic status. This means customers will, as at June 1, 2016, no longer have to claim for breaches covered under the JPS Guaranteed Standards", she says.

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“We have also embarked on an islandwide public education campaign where educating customers about their rights, responsibilities, as well as the Guaranteed Standards, are key messages. All these efforts might be wasted, however, if customers do not become more vigilant in identifying breaches and making claims, or ensuring they are compensated.”

Mrs. Nicholson is encouraging customers to get to know the Guaranteed Standards developed for the JPS and the NWC. Some of the standards address issues such as: wrongful disconnection, reconnection, the number of consecutive estimated bills a customer should receive, addressing complaints; meter replacement, and service disruption for customers on the AMI system.

Copies of the Guaranteed Standards can be accessed at any JPS and NWC customer service centre islandwide, on their websites, as well as on the OUR's website: www.our.org.jm

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Background:

The Guaranteed Standards are performance measures that guide the provision of utility services delivered by the NWC, JPS and small water providers to customers. If the companies fail to honour the agreement, affected customers are entitled to compensation which is applied as credit to their accounts. Customers are either compensated automatically, or are required to complete a claim form, depending on the breach committed against them.

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