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Billing issues top consumer complaints to OUR

(Kingston, Jamaica; January 28, 2016): Consumer complaints about billing related matters topped the list of issues handled by the Consumer Affairs Unit (CAU) of the Office of Utilities Regulation (OUR) for the September 2015 quarter. Billing matters include adjustments that were applied to customers' accounts, high consumption, disputed charges and estimated billing.

This was a highlight of the recently published Consumer Quarter Performance Report (July to September 2015).

Over the period, the CAU received 651 new contacts, with three hundred and thirty-five (335) representing billing matters and ninety-nine (99) relating to interruption of service issues. Both concerns continued to be the main reasons for customer contact.

Of the 335 billing contacts, Jamaica Public Service Company Ltd. (JPS) and National Water Commission (NWC) accounted for 131 and 135 contacts respectively.

The report also revealed that the OUR secured just over \$3.3 million for aggrieved utility customers. This amount represented a 111% increase over the sum secured in the preceding quarter.

The CAU fielded thirty (30) contacts in relation to alleged breaches of the Guaranteed Standards by the JPS and the NWC. JPS accounted for 19 while the NWC accounted for the remaining 11 of related contacts.

From the compliance report submitted for the month of July 2015, JPS reported a total of 10,253 Guaranteed Standards breaches, which had a potential pay-out of approximately \$20.65 million. Actual pay-outs only amounted to \$5,380,430, representing 26% of total payments due. Ninety-nine percent (99%) of JPS' total payments for Guaranteed Standards (GS) breaches was by way of automatic compensation to consumers. Of the total compensatory payments made, \$4.96 million resulted from the four additional standards which began attracting automatic compensation on 2015 June 1.

The Guaranteed Standard which relates to JPS issuing more than two consecutive estimated bills, continued to record the highest number of breaches accounting for 64% of total breaches.

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The NWC's compliance report on its performance under the Guaranteed Standards scheme for the review period indicated a total of 753 breaches being committed which had a potential pay-out of approximately \$2.33 million. However, actual payments amounted to only \$568,635.00, representing 24% of total potential payments.

The Standard with the highest number of breaches related to the NWC's delay in completing investigation or updating customers within 30 working days after receipt of their complaints. This standard accounted for 58% of total breaches.

The full Consumer Quarterly Report for the July to September 2015 period is available on the OUR's website, www.our.org.jm.

Contact:

Gordon Brown

Public Affairs Coordinator

 gordon.brown@our.org.jm or  968-6053

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