

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Four NWC Guaranteed Standards Suspension Should not Affect Bills, Access

(KINGSTON, Jamaica; 2020 May 18): The Office of Utilities Regulation (OUR) has taken note of public comments about any possible negative impact on customers of the recent suspension of four (4) Guaranteed Standards for the National Water Commission (NWC).

The OUR, which led the implementation of Guaranteed Standards for NWC, JPS and small water companies from as early as 2001, wishes to make it clear that a critical consideration for this decision was to ensure that there was no adverse effect on customers' bills or disruption to their water supply. The decision was therefore not taken lightly and was with the full consideration for consumer welfare and the prevailing emergency situation.

The suspension of Guaranteed Standards is not new and is considered where the utility indicates circumstances that are outside of its control that may reasonably impair its ability to achieve the standards. For instance, last year, the OUR agreed to temporarily put on hold two of these currently suspended NWC Standards (WGS7 & 8), as a result of delays in meter testing by the Bureau of Standards, which impacted NWC's delivery schedule to customers.

Guaranteed Standards have also been suspended for the Jamaica Public Service Company Limited (JPS) following a major hurricane, to allow the company the opportunity to focus its resources on restoring services islandwide in the shortest possible time. In all instances, these decisions were made public.

Under the NWC's Guaranteed Standard, the water commission should ensure that estimated bills are based on an average of the last three ACTUAL meter readings. Any variation from this methodology is a breach, and affected customers will be automatically compensated on their next bill. This compensation is equivalent to four times the service charge.

Notably, where a spike is noticed, provisions are in place for customers to lodge their complaints to the NWC before the due date, and pay their usual amount while their matter is being investigated. If customers remain dissatisfied with the NWC's action, they can contact the OUR via email: consumer@our.org.jm, by telephone: 876-968-6053, or through its social media pages.

Director of Consumer and Public Affairs at the OUR, Yvonne Nicholson says, "The OUR has always taken seriously, its role to protect the interest of customers. It is for that reason why we implemented the Guaranteed Standards, and conduct regular reviews of JPS's and NWC's performance against them. These reviews are contained in our **Quarterly Performance Reports** which are also made public, including posting them on our website."

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Mrs. Nicholson continues: “The OUR’s decision does not impact access to current water supply as customers who report faulty meters, for example, will continue to receive water supply. In such instances, they will be expected to continue to pay the average of their last three actual readings until the problem is rectified.”

NWC customers are invited to contact the NWC or the OUR if they need further clarification as a result of the suspension of these four Guaranteed Standards. As always the OUR remains open to providing a full explanation of the basis for, and the considerations given for its decisions.

BACKGROUND

The OUR recently announced that, following a request by the NWC, it has agreed to suspend four (4) of the seventeen (17) Guaranteed Standards for three (3) months from 2020 April 1 to 2020 June 30. The NWC, which had originally requested the suspension of all Guaranteed Standards, cited the constraints caused by the measures implemented by the Government to curtail the spread of COVID-19, and its own precautionary islandwide measures to address staff and public health and safety concerns.

The OUR, following its review, agreed to the suspension of four Standards, all of which will require physical visits to premises to provide connection for new supply, meter installation and reading of meters.

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