



Quarterly Rules

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Rule 2.07

Complaints to the Commission

Have you ever wondered how it works on our end with complaints? In many ways we all become “investigators” when a rate payer calls us with a problem.

I’m also happy to report that most of the time our investigation leads us to discover we simply need to provide more education to that rate payer. After all, just because we require each of you to provide a brochure which explains to all customers everything they need to know about having an account with you, it doesn’t mean they are going to read it!

This Rule explains the two different complaints, **Informal** and **Formal**, that may be filed at the Commission. Of course, no complaint can be taken here until we know your customer has first tried to resolve the issue with the company.

So let's take a look at the Rule.

Rule 2.07 Complaints to the Commission

A. Informal Complaints:

(1) Information Required

Complaints may be in written or oral form. Complainants shall give a name, address, name of the utility involved, account number if known, detailed description of the complaint, and the desired result.

(2) Notice to Customer and Utility

Within 3 business days after receiving an informal complaint, the Commission shall:

- a. explain complaint procedures to the complainant by telephone or in writing; and,
- b. Provide the details of the complaint to the utility.

(3) Utility Contact for Complaints

Each utility shall give the Commission's Consumer Services Office a current list of personnel who answer Commission questions about complaints. A utility representative with the authority to process commission questions about Complaints must always be available

during business hours. Utilities shall immediately report any change in the contact personnel to the Commission's Consumer Services office.

(4) Commission Requests for Information

Under Ark. Code Ann. § 23-2-309 the Commission may, at any time, require a utility to furnish any information which may be in its possession concerning rates, tolls, fares, charges, or practices used in conducting its service.

- a. Requests may include, but are not limited to, copies of correspondence, internal memoranda, and reports to the customer; and, an itemized billing history which includes all billed amounts, applicable billing and due dates, information contained on shut-off notices, customer payments, suspensions, and reconnections.

(5) Utility Responses to Requests for Information

- a. A utility shall respond to Commission requests for information concerning any complaints as quickly as possible, but not later than 15 calendar days after receipt.
- b. The utility shall respond directly to the Commission and shall not initiate contact or correspond with the complainant,

unless first authorized by a representative of the Commission's Consumer Services office.

(6) Effect of Complaint on Suspension

- a. When a customer disputes a utility's reason for shutting off service, the utility shall NOT suspend service while the utility or the Commission processes the complaint. If the utility's reason for shutting off service is Rule 6.01.A. , D., E., F., H., O., or Q., the customer may be required to post a deposit with the utility equal to the disputed amount while the utility or the Commission processes the complaint. The customer must pay any undisputed amounts by the date printed on the most recent shut-off notice to avoid suspension of service. If the utility is in error, the deposit will be refunded with interest.
- b. The utility may waive the deposit allowed by this Rule.
- c. Nothing contained in Rule 2.07.A (6) a. shall prevent a customer who fails to post a deposit under this Rule from filing a formal complaint with the Commission.

d. The utility may suspend service for some other valid reason set out in Rule 6.01 while the utility or the Commission processes the complaint.

(7) Commission Investigation and Report

The Commission shall investigate each informal complaint, issue an informal complaint investigation report to the complainant, and notify the utility of the results of the investigation. The Commission will provide the utility a copy of any written investigation report given to the complainant.

(8) Disputed Results

The utility or the complainant may file a formal complaint if not satisfied with the informal complaint results. The Commission shall provide information to the complainant which explains formal complaint procedures.

B. Formal complaints:

(1) Who may file

a. Any chamber of commerce or board of trade, mercantile, agricultural, or manufacturing association, any public utility, any municipality, any customer

of a public utility, any person unlawfully treated by a public utility, or any public utility unlawfully treated by a customer, may complain to the Commission in writing.

- b. Any consumer or prospective consumer of any utility service may complain to the Commission about the service, furnishing of service, or any discrimination in service or rates. (Ark. Code Ann. § 23-3-119)

(2) Procedures

- a. Complaints must first be made to the utility before they are made to the Commission.
- b. The complaint shall be filed according to the Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure. Sample copies of formal complaints and instructions are available from the Commission.

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Is it a top priority to explain and or educate the customer when they reach out to you with questions?

We covered this Rule three years ago, but it seems like a good time to revisit it. We do our best to ensure no complaint ever goes to a formal and we hope your company has the same goal as well. We have discovered sometimes the same information given by a different representative can be received differently! Even as keeper of the Rules, we have personality problems from time to time.

Do you have steps in place to help each other with difficult customers when there is a need? Possibly taking the customer's call-back information and having someone else call them back or in some cases, when you realize the customer is clearly agitated, suggesting they call you back when they can calm down.

Many of our complaints start with customers telling us they never got that call-back though. This only creates another missed chance at resolving the issue before we have to open a complaint on our end.

Once we open a complaint and establish the customer has tried to resolve the issue with you, we will need all the information you have dealing with the situation. This is NOT because we are trying to catch you doing something wrong. We clearly understand no matter how many steps you have in place, there will always be those who don't like what they are told. We simply try to be as thorough as possible so that no significant detail is overlooked.

As stated earlier, different personalities require different techniques in explaining. I fear some of you are on time restraints with your calls and this leads to “cookie cutter” explanations. These “cookie cutter” explanations may not be educating the rate payer and you may be guaranteeing you will be talking to the very same customer again about the same situation down the road!

On our end, we explain to the customer that we need to know the **WHOLE** truth before we call the company. When did they pay last? Did they have an extension or payment plan? We clearly explain to the customer that we will also be calling the company to start the investigation and will need any and all information they can give us about the situation - which is a much nicer way of saying we will be calling the company to get the “rest of the story”!

The same goes with our calls to you. We need all the information you can give us to try and resolve this problem. When you leave out an important detail and the customer is the one to bring it up, it instills distrust in your customer as well as creates more calls back and forth between us. Not that we don't enjoy talking with you guys! I realize many of you think at times that our questions are overkill, and yet the goal is as it has always been; to help answer and educate the customer's concerns rather than the situation going to a formal complaint.



# Melting Pot

In keeping with this rule, we have run into problems as it pertains to A (3) - Utility Contact for Complaints. I realize we have an updated list of contacts for each company as per the Rule, but many of you are not keeping us informed when someone is on vacation or out with an illness. There are others who always keep us informed, and we thank you for that. There is nothing worse than needing to resolve a situation and having to spend time trying to discover who is taking the complaints in the absence of our regular liaison.

Finally, when coding an account **Elderly and Individuals with Disabilities**, we'd like you to make sure the customer understands this code is not a permanent medical extension which will keep their service on indefinitely. Many who call our office seem to think because they have this code on their account the company can never shut them off. Please make sure you are explaining the benefits of this code properly.

That's All Folks!