

Regulatory News



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Rule 1.02 Purpose and Scope

Why do we need regulation? This was one of the first questions I asked when I began my employment with the Arkansas Public Service Commission. In those early days of training I soon discovered the answer to that question was right there in the beginning of the Rules.

In fact, section one in both our GSR (General Service Rules) and the TPR (Telecommunications Providers Rules) explains very clearly that Discrimination and or retaliation are prohibited.

Rule 1.02. Purpose and Scope

A. These Rules set forth standards for service by each utility. These Rules are intended to ensure adequate service, prevent discrimination and unfair practices, and protect both the consumers and utilities from unreasonable demands.





Fairness is not an attitude. It's a professional skill that must be developed and

exercised.

Brit Hume



B. Any general utility service regulation, policy, procedure, rule or service application, except those approved in special contracts by this Commission, that conflicts with these Rules is void and unlawful, unless the utility files a formal application for an exemption and the Commission approves it. These Rules are not intended to, and do not, affect or replace any Commission-approved general service regulation, policy, procedure, rule or service application of any utility which addresses items other than those covered in these Rules.

C. Unless the context otherwise requires, wherever the masculine gender is used in these Rules, it shall include the feminine gender

D. Unless the context otherwise requires, wherever the singular form of a word is used in these Rules, it shall include the plural form, and wherever the plural form is used, it shall include the singular.



When I started these newsletters years ago, I explained that our office was here for the company as well as the customer. I've gotten to know many of you through phone calls and e-mails and together we have discovered that two heads really can be better than one.

It shows diligence in your job performance that you are trying to ensure you are taking the right action on an account. Just remember, you cannot do for one customer what you would not do for all others in the same circumstance since for fairness sake, we must treat all customers the same!



The Melting Pot



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Let's talk about a few more areas we've seen some problems with in the past few months:

Information given to customers who are dealing with "shut off" notices.

I realize Rule 6.08.C. (Payment requirements to prevent Suspension) states you shall not require the customer to pay for usage which has not been billed, or which has been billed but is not yet overdue, yet how many of you inform the customer of the current bill and due date when talking to them about their shut off notice?

I ask this question because we get calls from customers who don't understand why they owe again so soon after paying on a shut off. This tells us the customer was not informed of the current bill when they were trying to discuss their shut off notice. Of course, I realize you bill them regularly and they have a responsibility to know this, but let's remember that most customers who find themselves in a shut off situation are in over their head for one reason or another. Why not take the time to help them understand what it takes to either keep from being shut off or to get turned back on and then take a few more seconds to explain what they are facing in the future. It could prevent some of the calls later when they don't understand and maybe even help eliminate some of the paying "shut off" notice to "shut-off" notice situations.





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Account holders that are deceased: Please remember that if you discover an account holder is deceased, you must send a notice that a viable customer is needed to take responsibility for the account at that location. You cannot collect from a deceased person so that should be incentive enough.

Increasing deposits on accounts with poor pay records: Do you look closely at the two highest bills? Are you checking to insure the bills you are using are actual bills and not estimated ones? Do you also check the billing periods “before” those high bills to ensure they were not estimated ones? This is not fair to the customer and something I feel may be happening by mistake on your part. Just slow down and insure you are using valid bills without estimated situations surrounding them. Otherwise, we will be asking you to lower the customer’s deposit.

Back billing issues dealing with dead meters – This continues to be a problem and in the past few months I’ve looked into some that have been dead for an unbelievable amount of time! Needless to say, this sends up a huge red flag in our office. How they go unnoticed for so long is the big question and without a viable answer you might just find a Data Request on “zero usage” meters that will be keeping you busy for a long time!

We discussed the proper procedure that should be used for calculating the back billed amount in our last newsletter and what Rule to use for this, so what I’d like





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to talk about this time is the manner in which some of you are notifying your customers of the need for back billing. I find it unbelievable that many simply send out form letters to give notification of situations like this.

There are no Rules to say the company must contact the customer personally to explain the need for back billing; yet one would think in the interest of “good customer service” common sense would direct you to do so. After all, I would hope these situations are far and few between.

Then again, maybe I should thank some of you for such an impersonal way of informing your customers as this leads to their lack of understanding and confusion which in turn, seems to be the catalyst that fuels their call to our office.

Although I cannot demand you to be more personal in situations like this, I think I’ve now given you a huge “heads up” as to how we discover a lot of these situations in the first place.

In closing, I’d like to give you a “sneak preview” of the Rule we will be talking about in the December newsletter.

We will be looking at Rule **6.19. (Provisions for Landlords and Tenants)**. Recently we have seen an influx of both questions from the companies and complaints from the landlords dealing with this Rule.





Please read it over and if you have something you need a bit more clarity on within this Rule, please send me an e-mail with your questions. I promise if you have questions about something....you can bet others do as well.

For now please remember that you must post shut off notices on all tenant occupied property where the landlord is the account holder on the property and is **NOT** paying the bill! Do not allow yourself to get dragged into a situation where the Landlord is using this practice as a form of eviction!

I guess that about covers it for our September newsletter. I truly hope by the time you are reading this, our beautiful state is feeling some relief from all the heat and as I type it appears that relief will come in the name of Isaac!

That's All Folks!

