

The Florida Public Service Commission announces a staff rule development workshop to consider proposed revisions to Rule 25-22.032, F.A.C., Customer Complaints, at the following time and place:

DATE AND TIME: Friday, November 19, 1999, at 9:30 a.m.

PLACE: Room 148, Betty Easley Conference Center, 4075 Esplanade Way, Tallahassee, FL 32399-0862.

The proposed revisions to the rule are extensive, and they are designed to promote the prompt and effective resolution of disputes between regulated companies and their customers.

A draft of the proposed revisions is included in this notice.

A copy of the agenda for the workshop may be obtained after November 5, 1999, from Mary Diskerud, Division of Appeals, Public Service Commission, 2540 Shumard Oak Blvd., Tallahassee, FL 32399-0850, (850) 413-6090.

Any person requiring some accommodation at this workshop because of a physical impairment should call the Division of Records and Reporting at (850) 413-6770 at least 48 hours prior to the workshop. Any person who is hearing or speech impaired should contact the Florida Public Service Commission by using the

Florida Relay Service, which can be reached at: 1-800-955-8771.

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25-22.032 Customer Complaints.

It is the Commission's intent that disputes between regulated companies and their customers be resolved as quickly, effectively, and inexpensively as possible. This rule establishes customer complaint procedures that are designed to accomplish that intent. The rule requires transfer-connect telephone numbers between certain companies and the Commission, and it includes an expedited process for complaints that can be resolved quickly by the customer and the company without extensive Commission participation. The rule also includes a process for Commission resolution of a complaint if the company and the customer cannot resolve the complaint themselves.

(1) Any customer of a Commission regulated company may file a complaint with the Division of Consumer Affairs whenever the customer has an unresolved dispute with the utility regarding electric, gas, telephone, water, or wastewater service. The complaint may be communicated orally or in writing. The complaint must include the name of the company against which the complaint is made, the name of the customer of record, and the service address. Upon receipt of the complaint, a staff member will determine if the customer has contacted the utility and, if the customer agrees, will put the customer in contact with the company for resolution of the complaint.

(2) Transfer-connect Requirement.

(a) Each company specified in paragraph (2)(b) shall provide

a transfer-connect (warm transfer) telephone number by which the Commission may directly transfer a customer to that company's customer service representative. When the transfer is complete, any further charges for the call shall be the responsibility of the company and not the Commission or the customer. Each company must provide customer service representatives to handle transferred calls during the Commission's normal business hours; Monday through Friday, 8:00 A.M to 5:00 P.M., Eastern time.

(b) The following types of companies shall obtain a transfer connect number:

1. All local exchange telecommunications companies;
2. Alternative local exchange telecommunications companies with annual gross intrastate revenues greater than \$750,000;
3. Interexchange telecommunications companies with annual gross intrastate revenues greater than \$750,000;
4. All investor owned electric utilities;
5. All investor-owned gas companies with more than 25,000 customers;
6. All Class A water or wastewater companies with annual gross intrastate revenues in excess of \$750,000.

(3) Complaints resolved within three (3) days.

If companies are able to resolve customer complaints within three days, they shall be resolved in the following manner:

(a) The Commission staff member handling the complaint will forward a description of the complaint to the company for

response and resolution. The three day period will begin at 5:00 p.m. on the day the information is sent to the company and end at 5:00 p.m. on the third day, excluding weekends and holidays. If the company satisfactorily resolves the complaint, the company shall notify the staff member of the resolution.

(b) The Commission will contact the customer to confirm that the complaint has been resolved. If the customer confirms that the complaint has been resolved, the complaint will not be reported in the total number of complaints shown for that company in the Commission Consumer Complaint Activity Report. However, the Commission will retain the information for use in enforcement proceedings, or for any other purpose necessary to perform its regulatory obligations.

(c) If the customer informs the Commission staff member that the complaint has not been resolved, the Commission will notify the company and require a full report as prescribed in subsection (4).

(4) Complaints not resolved within three days.

If the customer does not agree to contact the company directly, or if the customer is not satisfied with the company's proposed resolution of the complaint, a Commission staff member will investigate the complaint and attempt to resolve the dispute in the following manner:

(a) The staff member will notify the company of the complaint and request a response. The company shall provide its

response to the complaint within fifteen (15) working days. The response shall explain the company's actions in the disputed matter and the extent to which those actions were consistent with applicable statutes and regulations. The response shall also describe all attempts to resolve the customer's complaint.

(b) The staff member investigating the complaint may request copies of bills, billing statements, field reports, written documents, or other information in the participants' possession that may be necessary to resolve the dispute. The staff member may perform, or request the company to perform, any tests, on-site inspections, and reviews of company records necessary to aid in the resolution of the dispute.

(5) During the complaint process, a company shall not discontinue service to a customer because of an unpaid disputed bill. However, the company may require the customer to pay that part of a bill which is not in dispute. If the company and the customer cannot agree on the amount in dispute, the staff member will make a reasonable estimate to establish an interim disputed amount until the complaint is resolved. If the customer fails to pay the undisputed portion of the bill the company may discontinue the customer's service pursuant to Commission rules.

(6) The staff member will propose a resolution of the complaint based on the information provided by all participants to the complaint and applicable statutes and regulations. The proposed resolution may be either oral or written. Upon request,

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within the 15 days.

(c) The Director of the Division will review the Customer statement and either appoint a staff member to conduct the informal conference, or make a recommendation to the Commission for dismissal based on a finding that the complaint states no basis upon which relief may be granted.

(d) If a conference is granted, the staff member appointed to conduct the conference shall not have participated in the investigation or proposed resolution of the complaint.

(e) After consulting with the participants, the staff member will send a written notice to the participants setting forth the unresolved issues, the procedures to be followed at the informal conference, the dates by which written materials are to be filed, and the time and place for the conference. The conference may be held by telephone conference, video teleconference, or in person, no sooner than ten days following the notice.

(f) At the conference, the participants shall have the opportunity to present information, orally or in writing, in support of their positions. During the conference, the staff member may encourage the parties to resolve the dispute. The Commission will be responsible for tape-recording, but not transcribing, the informal conference. A participant may arrange for transcription at his own expense.

(g) The staff member may permit any participant to file additional information, documentation, or arguments. The opposing

participant shall have an opportunity to respond.

(h) If a settlement is not reached within 20 days following the informal conference or the last post-conference filing, the staff member shall submit a recommendation to the Commission for consideration at the next available Agenda Conference. Copies of the recommendation shall be sent to the participants.

(i) If the Director denies the request for an informal conference, the participants shall be notified in writing. Within 20 days of giving notice, the staff shall submit a recommendation for consideration at the next available Agenda Conference. Copies of the recommendation shall be sent to the participants.

(j) The Commission will address the matter by issuing a notice of proposed agency action or by setting the matter for hearing pursuant to section 120.57, Florida Statutes.

(7) At any point during the complaint proceedings, a participant has the right to be represented by an attorney or other qualified representative. For purposes of this rule a qualified representative may be any person the party chooses, unless the Commission sets the matter for hearing. If the Commission sets the matter for hearing, the participants may be represented by an attorney or a qualified representative as prescribed in Uniform Rule 28-106.106, Florida Administrative Code, or may represent themselves. Each participant shall be responsible for his own expenses in the handling of the

complaint.

(8) At any time the participants may agree to settle their dispute. If a settlement is reached, the participants or their representatives shall file with the Division of Consumer Affairs a written statement to that effect. The statement shall indicate that the settlement is binding on both participants, and that the participants waive any right to further review or action by the Commission. If the complaint has been docketed, the Division of Consumer Affairs shall submit the settlement to the Commission for approval. If the complaint has not been docketed, the Division will acknowledge the statement of settlement by letter to the participants.

(9) Record retention and auditing.

(a) All companies shall retain any telephone notes or written documentation relating to each Commission complaint for three years, beginning when the complaint was first received.

(b) All companies shall file with the Commission, beginning 60 days after the effective date of this rule and yearly thereafter, a report that summarizes the following information for the preceding calendar year:

1. The total number of calls handled via transfer connect, including the customer's name, and the company resolution;

2. The number of complaints handled under the three day complaint resolution procedure;

(c) The Commission shall have access to all such records for

audit purposes.

Specific Authority 120.53(1), 350.127(2) FS.

Law Implemented 120.53(1), 120.57, 120.59(4) FS.

History--New 1-3-89, Amended 10-28-93.



FLORIDA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION
INFORMAL CONFERENCE REQUEST FORM

FPSC Compliant Number: _____

Customer's Name: _____

Legal Representative: _____

Address: _____

Telephone Number: (Voice) _____ (Fax) _____

E-mail address (if any): _____

Please address the following statements using additional pages if necessary.

Please identify the issues to be resolved. _____

Please describe the facts that are in dispute. _____

Please identify the dollar the amount in dispute. _____

Please provide a suggested resolution or the relief sought. _____

NOTICE: This form must be postmarked by (Date). Failure to provide this information may result in denial of the informal conference request.

PSC/CAF Form X (09/99)