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District of Columbia Public Service Commission

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The District of Columbia Public Service Commission is an independent agency established by Congress in 1913 to regulate electric, natural gas, and telephone companies in the District of Columbia.

Fact Sheet

Revised Utility Consumer Bill of Rights Now Effective

A new Consumer Bill of Rights (“CBOR”) is effective September 25, 2009, providing enhanced protection for the District's utility consumers, according to the D.C. Public Service Commission. The CBOR provides the rights and responsibilities of consumers and service providers, and describes consumer safeguards in the purchasing natural gas, electric, and local telephone services in a competitive environment.

The original CBOR was enacted 25 years ago, when it covered only the three- electric, natural gas, and local telephone- utility companies. With the emergence of competition in all three of the utility sectors, the Commission initiated action four years ago to update and expand the CBOR to cover all utility service companies. To ensure public input, the Commission established a CBOR Working Group composed of representatives from the Office of the People’s Counsel, Advisory Neighborhood Commissions, civic associations, the utility companies, competitive suppliers/providers and the Commission. The purpose of the CBOR Working Group was to draft revised and updated rules. Thereafter, the Commission published several Notices of Proposed Rulemakings that sought and obtained comments from diverse segments of the public and industry.

The CBOR is designed for residential consumers, and was adopted to promote administrative efficiency and uniformity, and to increase the public’s understanding of consumer rights and responsibilities regarding natural gas, electric and local telecommunications services in the District. It provides information on the rules governing services provided by the three utility companies, energy suppliers, and local telecommunications carriers. It also establishes consumer protection laws for enforcement authority to ensure District residents are adequately protected.

The CBOR covers the procedures and steps consumers and providers must follow in the areas of Billing, Payments, Use of Consumer Information, Disconnection of Service, Consumer Inquiries, and Informal and Formal Complaints. Specifically, the following are a few of the consumer rights, rules and responsibilities addressed in the revised CBOR:

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- **Billing:** All energy and telecommunications bills must include the name and phone number of the Commission and the Office of the People's Counsel. In addition, bills from energy suppliers must include emergency telephone numbers for Washington Gas or Pepco, whichever is applicable;
- **Use of Customer Information:** Consumers are not required to disclose Social Security numbers to the utility, energy supplier or local telecommunications service provider to obtain or maintain services. Unless consumers consent in writing, the utilities, energy suppliers, or local telecommunications service providers may not disclose or use information about consumers, and what is supplied to the utilities, energy suppliers or local telecommunication service providers by consumers for any purpose;
- **Disconnections and Reconnections of Services:** A utility cannot disconnect residential service unless a disconnection notice has been sent to consumers at the billing address by either first class mail or other technological means at least fifteen days, and ten days for a utility providing telecommunications services prior to the date of proposed disconnection;
- **Customer Inquiries and Complaints:** If a complaint cannot be resolved between the consumer and the utility, energy supplier, or local telecommunications service provider, the utility, energy supplier or telecommunications service provider must inform the consumer of the right to contact the Commission for resolution, and advise the consumer of the availability of the Office of the People's Counsel to assist in resolving a dispute before the Commission;
- **Public Access to Rules and Rates:** Each utility, energy supplier, or local telecommunications service provider must have Spanish translation services available during normal business hours at no cost to consumers; and
- **Formal Hearing Procedures:** A formal hearing will, if appropriate, be scheduled 45 days after the filing of a complaint response. The Commission's Office of Consumer Services will notify consumers at least 14 days prior to the hearing date unless the parties agree to a shorter time.

To obtain a copy of the CBOR, please contact the Commission at 202-626-5100 or visit the Commission's website at www.dcpssc.org.

The Public Service Commission of the District of Columbia is an independent agency established by Congress in 1913 to regulate electric, natural gas, and local telecommunication service utility companies that service the District of Columbia.

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