

## CONTACT INFORMATION

**MINNESOTA PUBLIC  
UTILITIES COMMISSION**  
121 Seventh Place East, Suite 350  
Saint Paul, MN 55101-2147

### **Business Office**

**651-296-7124**

**1-800-657-3782**

**Fax: 651-297-7073**

**[www.puc.state.mn.us](http://www.puc.state.mn.us)**

### **Consumer Assistance**

**651-296-0406**

**Toll Free: 1-800-657-3782**

**Call Center hours are 9 am to 4 pm**

**Monday through Friday**

**Email: [consumer.puc@state.mn.us](mailto:consumer.puc@state.mn.us)**

Regulating  
Utility Service  
in Minnesota...

**THE  
MINNESOTA  
PUBLIC  
UTILITIES  
COMMISSION**



## COMMISSION AND STAFF

### Executive Office

#### Five Commissioners

- Are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate
- One is designated to serve as Chair for a term concurrent with that of the Governor
- Serve six-year terms with appointments made on a staggered basis
- No more than three Commissioners can be of the same political party
- At least one Commissioner must reside at the time of appointment outside the seven-county metropolitan area

#### An Executive Secretary

- Serves as Chief of Staff and Chief Administrative Officer

### Staff Units

#### Business Office

#### Consumer Affairs

#### Energy

#### Energy Facilities Permitting

#### Information Technology

#### Legal

#### Telecommunications



Minnesota's per capita regulatory costs are among the *lowest* in the nation!

## COMMISSION OPERATIONS

**Quasi-Judicial** - Sets rates and terms of service, or otherwise resolves issues related to an individual company or certain groups of companies

- Sets rates for those utility service providers that are comprehensively regulated which include:
  - Investor-owned gas and electric utilities*
  - Dakota Electric Cooperative*
  - Local and in-state long distance telephone service providers*
- Decides individual cases on their merits by holding hearings, making findings of fact and findings of law, and issuing orders binding specific persons

**Legislative** - Sets broad policies that affect all companies in an industry, as when it establishes rules

*(Rules - An administrative rule is adopted by an agency to make the law it administers more specific or to govern the agency's organization or procedure. An agency rule that is adopted under the rulemaking provisions of Minnesota Statutes has the force and effect of law.)*

- Creates rules relating to the conduct of utilities and the procedures under which the Commission operates
- Establishes service standards for a broader (beyond the regulated utilities) class of utility service providers

**Forum** - For resolving disputes between the public and utilities

- Considers the various viewpoints of interested parties, monitors utility operations, initiates investigations, and deliberates in the public interest
- Resolves consumer complaints through the Consumer Affairs Office

# THE MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

# UTILITY REGULATION RESPONSIBILITIES

**Regulates** the rates, services and policies of providers of:

**Natural Gas**  
**Electricity**  
**Telecommunications**

**Approves** the development of:

**Large Energy Facilities**

**Ensures** a regulatory balance that enables the utilities to provide their customers:

**Service**  
that is **Safe, Reliable, Efficient**  
**Rates**  
that are **Reasonable, Fair**

The provision of electric, natural gas and telecommunications services are necessary to a modern society. The Commission ensures that utility services are delivered safely, reliably and efficiently by:

- Emphasizing the production and consumption of energy resources that will minimize damage to the environment
- Encouraging conservation
- Implementing the state's energy policies
- Establishing rules related to safety and quality of service
- Encouraging the development and appropriate implementation of new technologies and services for the public

## Telecommunications

- Review of matters relating to rates and services of telephone companies
- Setting rates and regulation of service quality for large local exchange carriers (e. g. Qwest)
- Review of rates upon complaint and setting service quality standards for over 100 independent, municipal, and cooperative carriers
- Certification and service quality regulation for long distance carriers (AT&T, MCI and hundreds more)
- Rule-making to guide the transition to deregulated market

## Energy Rates and Planning

- Review of all matters relating to natural gas or electricity coming before the Commission
- Cases investigated by the Energy Unit fall into several broad categories: rate changes, energy resource planning and certification, service area matters, mergers and acquisitions, and formal complaints
- Monitoring of the structural changes occurring in these industries
- Setting rates and regulation of service quality for large electric and natural gas companies

## Energy Facilities Permitting

- Issuing construction permits for large electric power plants, electric transmission lines, and oil or gas pipelines and storage facilities which may require:
  - Certificate of need for large energy facilities
  - Site permit for the location of large power plants, including wind farms
  - Route permit for the location of large electric transmission lines and large pipelines

### Weekly Calendar

The Public Utilities Commission Weekly Calendar listing utility matters before the Commission is available online at the PUC website homepage. Each case is assigned a docket number. A docket search is also available to locate dockets by number or type or date.

### Consent Calendar

A subcommittee of one commissioner handles items deemed by the Commission to be routine or non-controversial in nature. The commissioner assigned to the subcommittee will be authorized to decide upon such items on behalf of the Commission. The subcommittee eliminates the need for a Commission meeting to issue orders for these cases and helps to minimize potential backlogs in processing large volumes of non-controversial cases. In the event of an objection to the subcommittee decision, the affected docket would be placed on an agenda for the earliest possible Commission agenda meeting.

### eFiling for Utilities

Each year, the PUC receives over 2,000 formal new filings from regulated companies involving telephone or energy utility matters.

In 2006 the Department of Commerce and the Public Utilities Commission launched the electronic filing system at:

<https://www.edockets.state.mn.us/EFiling/home.jsp> as a shared service. Now, an eFiled document can be filed, submitted, reviewed and published within hours.

eFiling:

- Makes information from utilities available to the public immediately
- Provides online registration to file documents
- Expands electronic information management and workflow

**The Public is Encouraged  
to Attend Public Hearings  
and Commission Meetings!**

### Public Hearings

The Commission encourages public participation in Commission decisions. In general rate increase applications, and in other cases of wide public interest, hearings designed to elicit comment from members of the public are often scheduled.

Consumer Affairs staff provide procedural information to people who want to participate in public hearings and are also available at most individual public hearings to answer customer service-related questions and/or provide mediation services.

Interactive video enables the Commission to host public hearings at a greater number of locations than traveling would permit. Comments on individual cases can also be submitted in writing without having to attend a hearing.

### Attending Hearings and Meetings

Public hearings and Commission meetings are open to everyone. Public hearings are generally conducted by an Administrative Law Judge who also conducts evidentiary hearings in the case and provides a recommendation to the Commission.

Regularly scheduled Commission agenda meetings are conducted by the Commission Chair along with four other Commissioners. These are open meetings normally conducted each Thursday at the Commission offices. These meetings are more formal and are designed to accept comments from formal parties to a case as well as deliberate evidence parties submit for Commission consideration.

## TELEPHONE SERVICE DISCOUNT PROGRAMS

Designed to promote universal service by providing low-income individuals with discounts on new telephone service installations and monthly telephone service.

**Link-Up** - Provides a discount on new service connection charges when installing new telephone service. (federally-funded)

**Lifeline** - Provides a monthly discount on your local telephone service. (federally-funded)

### Telephone Assistance Plan (TAP)

- Provides a monthly discount on your local telephone service (state-funded)

For customers to be eligible, the telephone service must be in their name and they must participate in at least one of certain public assistance programs OR have income at or below 135% of the federal poverty guidelines.

## OTHER AGENCIES IMPACTING UTILITIES

### Minnesota Department of Commerce (DOC)

- Represents the public interest before the Commission
- Conducts investigations and enforces Commission orders  
651-296-4026 / [general.commerce@state.mn.us](mailto:general.commerce@state.mn.us)

### Office of the Minnesota Attorney General Citizen Assistance

- Represents the interests of residential and small business utility customers before the Commission  
651-296-3353 / 800-657-3787 / [attorney.general@state.mn.us](mailto:attorney.general@state.mn.us)

### Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (PCA)

- Regulates utility emissions to the air, soil and water

### Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC)

- Regulates wholesale gas and electric rates

### U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC)

- Controls the safety of nuclear power plants

### Federal Communications Commission (FCC)

- Governs interstate telecommunications matters

## CONSUMER AFFAIRS OFFICE

### Dispute Mediation

The Commission's Consumer Affairs Office is available to assist consumers in mediating disputes with most energy and telephone service companies. Consumer Affairs mediators work to resolve disputes using a process much less time-consuming than more formal processes and typically result in quicker complaint resolutions.

However, not all utility services fall under the Commission's authority. In order to learn what types of complaints can be filed with the Commission, customers may call or visit our website.

Customers wishing to file complaints must take the following steps:

#### FIRST

- Contact the energy or telephone company to resolve IF

- The complaint is not satisfactorily resolved

#### THEN

- Contact the Consumer Affairs Office

Individuals or companies may file complaints and inquiries with the Consumer Affairs Office using a simple, one-page form available on the Commission's website at [www.puc.state.mn.us](http://www.puc.state.mn.us). The signed complaint form must be submitted to allow the Commission to contact utility or telephone companies on the customer's behalf.

### Citizen Participation

The Consumer Affairs Office also provides valuable information about proceedings before the Commission. All citizens may submit statements in support of or opposition to any record pending before the Commission. These statements help inform the Commission and its staff of public concerns and to identify issues to be explored. The PUC encourages citizen participation in all of its proceedings.

# HEATING PROGRAMS

## The Cold Weather Rule

The Cold Weather Rule (CWR) regulates the conditions under which gas and electric utilities may disconnect residential service in the winter (from October 15 to April 15). The CWR requires that customers who have difficulty paying heating bills contact their utility to work out a mutually acceptable payment plan to keep their heat on.

The CWR is administered by the Public Utilities Commission through local utility companies which are required to offer shut-off protection to households. While all households can apply, households with income less than 50 percent of the state median income have the greatest number of payment options.

Customers must apply to the utility company that provides their heat. When customers receive a disconnection notice from the utility, CWR information will be included. Customers must contact the utility company to set up a CWR payment plan.

There are special payment plans for households who need to reconnect their heat at the beginning of the heating season. Under the rule, customers must make and keep a payment plan with their utility company to reconnect and keep their heat on until April 15.

Most utilities offer bill payment options, including budget plans that help even out the payment amount of each month's energy bill. Customers receiving energy assistance simply need to contact the utility to sign up for a payment plan.

Before the utility company may turn off service during the winter, it must send the customer all of the following:

- Disconnection notice
- List of the names and phone numbers of local energy, weatherization and conservation assistance providers
- Explanation of no-cost or low-cost methods of conserving energy

All utilities must follow some level of the Cold Weather Rule; however, delivered fuels, such as fuel oil, propane and wood, are not covered.

## Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

Helps low-income customers pay their heating bills through grant money paid directly to the utility company on behalf of the customer. Federally funded and administered by the Minnesota Department of Commerce through 38 local service providers around the state.

Customers with less than 50 percent of the state median income may qualify. Households with seniors, disabled, and children are especially encouraged to apply. Funding is always limited and is administered on a first-come/first-serve basis.

## Weatherization Assistance Program

Provides home energy conservation audits, safety inspections, and assessments of furnaces and indoor air quality for low-income households. Funded through the U.S. Department of Energy and administered by the Minnesota Department of Commerce.

## The Minnesota Department of Commerce Energy Information Center

Provides energy saving information homeowners can use to help control their heating costs.

Energy Assistance Hotline 651-296-5175

Toll free (in Minnesota) 1-800-657-3710

- Email: [energy.info@state.mn.us](mailto:energy.info@state.mn.us)
- [www.commerce.state.mn.us](http://www.commerce.state.mn.us)