

**BEFORE THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION  
OF THE STATE OF MISSOURI**

Mary Jackson,	)	
Complainant	)	
v.	)	
	)	File No. GC-2019-0331
Spire Missouri Inc. d/b/a Spire,	)	
Respondent	)	

**SPIRE MISSOURI INC.'S ANSWER**

COMES NOW Spire Missouri Inc. ("Spire Missouri" or "Company") and, pursuant to Commission Rule 4 CSR 240-2.070, files this Answer, respectfully stating as follows:

**INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

1. This case is a formal version of a series of informal high bill complaints. The customer claims she is being charged for more gas than she is actually using. She has made this claim each year beginning in 2016. Since 2016, the Company has checked for leaks, performed a high bill investigation, and changed and tested its meter. We have found no evidence of any inaccuracy or any other reason that the customer is being overcharged. Given the weather during the past few years, the configuration and age of Complainant's home, and the fact that the Complainant has a gas furnace, water heater, and range, the amount of gas usage billed has not been unusual.

2. Regarding complaints, the customer filed an informal complaint with the Commission in March 2016. The Company investigated and found her bills and usage were not particularly high. The customer's March 2016 bill showed a higher balance because no payment had been made on the February bill.

3. Complainant contacted the Company in February 2017 asking for an extension of time to pay. The Company representative declined to offer an extension. Complainant called back

immediately thereafter and disputed the charges on her bill, claiming she was overbilled. The Company then initiated a high bill investigation to check out the customer's dispute and found nothing to indicate that the billed usage was in error.

4. In March 2018, Complainant initiated an informal complaint claiming she was overcharged. The Company changed the meter at Complainant's home and the removed meter was tested on April 10, 2018. The meter tested within the 2% specification set forth in the Commission's rules.

5. In April 2019, Complainant filed an informal complaint again alleging that her bills were too high, and that she is not using the amount of gas for which she is being billed. The Company sent a technician out to read the meter to make sure the manual reading matched up with the readings sent from the automated meter reading device. The Complainant then filed this formal complaint.

6. In the end, this is a case of a customer who would like to use less gas and receive lower bills. We understand and sympathize with the customer's desire to conserve gas usage. However, the customer is required to pay for gas actually consumed.

### **ANSWER**

7. Allegations in the Complaint are not organized numerically. In answering the Complaint, Respondent Spire Missouri will state its understanding of the Complainant's main allegations and respond to them. Respondent denies any allegation not specifically addressed herein.

8. Complainant alleges that she has been overcharged every year by Respondent, going back, presumably, to 2016. In response, Respondent admits that Complainant has

complained of being overcharged in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019. Respondent denies that it has overcharged Complainant during any of these periods.

9. Complainant alleges that Respondent has been rendering estimated bills that have contributed to the alleged overcharges. Respondent denies that it has issued estimated bills. All of the gas bills sent by Respondent to Complainant during the 2016-19 time period were based on actual usage.

10. Complainant alleges that Respondent told her that she used the same amount of gas last year (2017-18) as this year (2018-19), and alleges that such a statement is inaccurate. Respondent states that when Complainant called to complain of overcharges, Respondent, as a matter of course, checked the customer's current usage and bills against prior usage and billing to see if there are any obvious anomalies. Respondent found that Complainant's current usage was not significantly different from prior usage. Respondent denies that Complainant has been overcharged.

A customer's gas usage can depend upon a number of factors, but the main factor affecting residential usage is winter weather. Below is a comparison of the customer's usage compared to weather, as represented by Heating Degree Days ("HDDs").<sup>1</sup>

<u>October 1 – April 1</u>	<u>2016-17</u>	<u>2017-18</u>	<u>2018-19</u>
Use	909	1248	1549
HDD	2742	3525	3863

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<sup>1</sup> HDDs represent the amount by which the average temperature in a day was below 65 degrees. So, if a given day has a high of 50 degrees and a low of 30, the average temperature for that day would be 40 degrees. Since 40 degrees is 25 degrees colder than 65 degrees, that day would have 25 HDDs. The sum of the HDDs for each day in a month equals the total number of HDDs for that month. Higher HDDs correlate to colder weather.

This data shows that the customer's usage has increased over the past three years, but an increase is not unexpected given the colder weather. The fact that the customer has complained about being overcharged each year demonstrates that the customer's complaints are being made without regard to the amount of use, and therefore have no basis in fact.

11. Complainant states that she has been off work since 2013. Respondent is without information or belief sufficient to answer this allegation. Respondent notes that Complainant has received federal energy assistance over the past few years. However, Respondent has not received federal energy assistance on Complainant's behalf for the 2018-19 period. A representative of Respondent recently contacted Complainant to urge her to seek LIHEAP assistance for this year, but Complainant declined to do so.

12. Complainant alleged that her furnace stopped working for 1½ months last year (2017-18). Respondent is without information or belief sufficient to answer this allegation.

13. Complainant alleges that her son paid off the Dec. 2018 – Jan. 2019 balance of \$255, and that the next bill (for usage in January) was \$327. Respondent admits that it received a payment in January 2019 of \$255.38, resulting in a balance of \$0.00 on Complainant's account. However, thereafter, bills were sent in February, March and April 2019 in the amounts of \$308.80, \$283.86, and \$194.32, against which payment of \$60.00 has been received. This leaves a balance as of the end of April 2019, of \$726.98.

14. Complainant states that she does not need to be on a budget. Respondent states that in the past, when Complainant has received federal energy assistance, LIHEAP rules required the Company to establish a budget for the customer in exchange for receiving the heat grant. Respondent admits that complainant does not like to be on a budget and has routinely cancelled the LIHEAP-driven budgets established by the Company, the result of which is that, following

cancellation of the budget, any outstanding balance becomes due and payable on the next bill. Respondent alleges that this has caused some confusion for the customer, because it has caused her balance to fluctuate.

15. Complainant alleges that Spire Missouri overcharges her every year so it can obtain heat grants from the government on her behalf. Spire denies this allegation.

16. Complainant alleges that she knows what amount of gas she uses. Respondent respectfully denies this allegation. Respondent does not know what actions Complainant takes on a day-to-day basis that may affect her gas usage. Respondent alleges that Complainant's history of complaining of being overcharged regardless of the level of gas used indicates that she does not know the amount of gas she is using. While each party can have its opinion of what the other party is doing, the one neutral party in this matter is the gas meter, which is a relatively simple device that does nothing more than record the amount of gas that passes through it. The Company can read the meter, check the meter, change the meter and test the meter, but in the end, if nothing is found to substantiate a problem, we must trust the meter.

17. Respondent denies that it has violated any law, or any rule, order, or decision of the Commission. Respondent denies each and every allegation not specifically addressed herein.

**WHEREFORE**, Spire Missouri respectfully requests the Commission accept this Answer.

Respectfully requested,

SPIRE MISSOURI INC.

By: /s/ Rick Zucker

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**Certificate of Service**

The undersigned certifies that a true and correct copy of the foregoing pleading was served on the parties to this case on this 29th day of May, 2019, by hand-delivery, e-mail, fax, or United States mail, postage prepaid.

**/s/ Rick Zucker**