Exhibit No.

Issues: Customer Service,

Customer Billing

Witness: J. Kay Niemeier Sponsoring Party: MoPSC Staff

Type of Exhibit: Surrebuttal Testimony

Case No.: WR-2011-0337

Date Testimony Prepared: February 2, 2012

# MISSOURI PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION REGULATORY REVIEW DIVISION UTILITY SERVICES

#### SURREBUTTAL TESTIMONY

**OF** 

J. KAY NIEMEIER

# MISSOURI-AMERICAN WATER COMPANY CASE NO. WR-2011-0337

Jefferson City, Missouri February 2012

\*\* Denotes Highly Confidential Information \*\*

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1	SURREBUTTAL TESTIMONY		
2	OF		
3	J. KAY NIEMEIER		
4	MISSOURI-AMERICAN WATER COMPANY		
5	CASE NO. WR-2011-0337		
6	Q. Please state your name and business address.		
7	A. J. Kay Niemeier, P. O. Box 360, Jefferson City, Missouri 65102.		
8	Q. Are you the same J. Kay Niemeier who contributed to the Cost of Service		
9	filing on November 17, 2011 and filed Rebuttal Testimony on January 19, 2012, in thi		
10	case?		
11	A. Yes.		
12	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY		
13	Q. Please state the purpose of your Surrebuttal Testimony.		
14	A. The purpose of my Surrebuttal Testimony is to respond to the Estimated		
15	Bills issue on pages 8 through 11 in the Rebuttal Testimony of Missouri-American Water		
16	Company (MAWC or Company) Witness Greg A. Weeks.		
17	RESPONSE TO ESTIMATED BILLS ISSUE		
18	Q. Mr. Weeks, on page 9, lines 1 through 10 of his Rebuttal Testimony,		
19	appears to imply that because the Aqua and Roark customers were newly acquired by		
20	MAWC, Staff's observations regarding bill printing anomalies such as water comparison		
21	charts not being printed and prior months' usage being inaccurate were not valid issues to		
22	raise in Staff's Cost of Service Report. Do you agree?		
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1 A. No. Staff's purpose in presenting this information in its Cost of Service 2 Report was to be comprehensive in its disclosure to the Commission of both what Staff 3 deems are Missouri Commission rule violations, as well as findings that demonstrate a 4 need for operational improvement and Company diligence. A Company, like MAWC, 5 that provides prior month's usage on customer bills or uses charts indicating monthly 6 usage should provide accurate information in a manner that customers can clearly 7 determine what the charts represent or usage being consumed, even if providing such information is not required by Commission Rule 4 CSR 240-13 (Chapter 13). The 8 9 information presented on customer billing statements should not be presented in such a 10 manner as to create confusion, but should provide clarification to the customer. In Staff's 11 view, these are logical and reasonable expectations of utility customer billing statements. 12 13 14 15

In addition, Staff met with MAWC personnel prior to its acquisition of the Aqua system and made the Company aware of prior service quality issues, meter reading issues, customer billing issues, prior Staff Aqua complaints and other topics with the goal of a successful transition. While Staff acknowledges improvement, it still has reservations regarding some of the Company's service quality performance primarily in the areas of billing and call center responses which makes it a valid issue for Staff to raise in this rate case.

- Q. Does Mr. Weeks' Rebuttal Testimony acknowledge that the Company made customer billing statement errors in the billing statements of the prior Aqua customers, if so, what specifically does he say regarding them?
- A. Yes, Mr. Weeks, in his Rebuttal Testimony, page 9, lines 15 – 17, acknowledges customer billing statement errors and attributes the errors to "tariff rate

details in the predecessor Company's tariffs that were unusual in the context of MAWC's systems." Commission Rules, specifically Chapter 13, require accurate billing while making provisions to correct billing errors. Additionally, the Company has the responsibility to ensure that the tariffs of the newly acquired service territories were accurately transitioned into MAWC's systems in order to render accurate bills for those customers.

The Company and Staff have worked together to identify the billing errors, including information that, by Commission Rule, needed to be printed on the billing statements, with appropriate customer billing adjustments. Regardless of work done after the acquisition, in Staff's opinion, it is incumbent upon the Staff to make the Commission aware of the errors. Staff identified seven billing errors that violated Chapter 13 and are listed on page 67 of Staff Report Cost of Service, filed November 17, 2011.

- Q. Mr. Weeks states on page 9, lines 21 23, of his Rebuttal Testimony that initial billing errors can be a "common consequence of utility acquisitions". Do you agree?
- A. No. Mr. Weeks' states that when a Missouri-regulated utility acquires another utility that billing errors can be a common consequence. While billing errors may occur as a result of acquisitions, Staff asserts that with proper processes in place, such as planning, organizing, directing and controlling billing systems and resources, utilities can more effectively make the transition to bill correctly. Mergers and acquisitions are to result in "no detriment" to consumers and the assumption that billing errors are going to be a "common consequence" seems counter to the "no detriment" standard.

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- Q. What was the billing error in Item 1 of Staff's Cost of Service Report?
- A. The billing error in Item 1 stated: "Customers were billed for periods other than a normal usage period defined as not less than twenty-six (26) nor more than thirty-five (35) days for a monthly billed customer".
- Q. What reason did the Company provide that would cause customer bills to be extended beyond the 35-day window?
- A. Generally, the Company indicates that meter reads that fall outside of expected parameters, (for example, inactive accounts showing usage, active accounts with zero reads and active accounts with usage outside of reasonable parameters) may require a service technician to be dispatched to the field. The process of dispatching the technician to the field and correcting the meter reading in some cases may cause the bill to generate outside of the 35-day window.
- Q. Please summarize what Staff views to be the difference in opinion between the Company and Staff regarding the Commission Rule on this matter.
- A. The Company indicates that 99% of its accounts are billed within 35 days and while the remaining 1% could be estimated, the Company chooses to pursue "correcting" the bill prior to mailing which can and does extend some bills beyond the 35-day window prescribed by Chapter 13. The Company cites "customer satisfaction issues" associated with the alternative of estimated billing as well as increased calls and costs to the Company's call center should the Company estimate customer bills. Mr. Weeks further states in his Rebuttal Testimony on page 11, lines 19 21, that "we are correcting bills prior to them being sent to the customer. Under Chapter 13, it is permissible to send corrected bills outside the 35 day window."

Q. Does Staff disagree with the Company's assessment that Chapter 13 permits such extended billing times beyond the 35-day period? If so, why?

A. Yes. Definitions found in Commission Rule 4 CSR 240-13.015(B)(C) defines "bill" as "a written demand for payment for service and the taxes and franchise fees related to it" while (C) provides the definition for billing period as "a normal usage period of not less than twenty-six (26) nor more than thirty-five (35) days for a monthly billed customer nor more than one hundred (100) days for a quarterly billed customer, except for initial, corrected or final bills."

The Company's practice does not include making a written demand for payment as nothing has been demanded of the customer. In fact, Staff understands that some of these "bills" are not printed, but regardless, they have not been presented to the customer as to be "corrected".

The Company has indicated to Staff that it believes its process of obtaining an accurate meter read and billing the customer outside of the 35-day window is providing the customer a corrected bill. Staff disagrees with Company's position. Staff is of the opinion that in the definition of a billing period, the word "corrected" bill means a bill that is rendered and/or mailed to the customer in order to make a previously mailed bill accurate.

- Q. Does Staff disagree with the Company's assessment that Chapter 13 permits such extended billing times beyond the 35-day period for any other reasons?
- A. Yes. The Company indicated in its responses to Staff's DR Nos. 196, Revised 196 and 247, that while it has a preventative measure in place to prevent proration of customer billing statements, exceptions beyond the 35-day period are

allowed in "opening and closing billing statements, or customer statements in which MAWC has held the account waiting for read verification or actual reading from a service order. If the verification period extends beyond the window and the reading is updated upon closing of the order, the customer may receive a prorated statement outside of the standard window." This response indicates that the Company permits bills beyond the 35 days to accommodate its internal processes regardless of Commission Rule requirements.

Of additional concern to Staff is the Company's statement in its response to Staff's DR Nos. Revised 196 and 247 that it does "not monitor our system for accounts that bill outside the 35 day billing window. In the event that a customer receives a billing statement for charges that are outside the 35 day window the customer is billed a per day charge." In summary, the Company is stating that customer bills that extend beyond the 35-day billing window are acceptable and appropriate and that the Company does not monitor its system for such exclusions. Staff asserts that monitoring the monthly number of customers billed for more than 35 days of service would provide important and useful information regarding its billing operations.

Using the Company's logic, as long as it is verifying meter reads or obtaining actual meter reads from a service order, it might never be required to bill a customer within the 35-day window and the Company would be permitted to bill some customers for an indefinite number of days. Such a process violates Commission Rules0

Q. Does the Company's practice of billing outside of the 35-day window create any inequities or problems for its customers?

A. Yes. During its review of the billing statements, Staff noted that
customers billed for greater than 35 days of service had their monthly water customer
charge, monthly water usage charge, monthly wastewater customer charge and monthly
primacy fee prorated. Prorated amounts of all charges were calculated using the same
formula. The Company explained its calculation as follows: Monthly water custome
charge / 30 days x number of days for current billing period. During its review, Staff
noted a customer billing statement with a monthly water customer charge of \$29.83 for a
billing period of 36 days (\$29.83/30 x 36). Using the Company's formula, the charge
would be \$35.78; however, the Company charged the customer \$35.80. This \$29.83
water customer charge is a monthly fee to be billed the customer for their 26 to 35 days
of service. Yet, the customer is being billed an additional \$5.97 because their billing
period is for 36 days instead of 26 to 35 days of service permitted by Commission Rule
In the above example, the customer is being overcharged.

The Company asserted to Staff that when this occurs, the customer is not overcharged. The Company informed Staff that these prorated charges on these bills for greater than 35 days of service correct on the following month's billing statement because the customer is billed for less than 26 days of service. Billing the following month for less than 26 days of service is a violation of the Commission's Chapter 13 Rule. In Staff's review of customer billing statements that were greater than 35 days of service, it did not always find that bills were corrected the following month by billing the customer for less than 26 days of service.

Q. Do any other Missouri-regulated utilities practice MAWC's procedure to bill customers for more than 35 days of service?

A.

its customers for more than 35 days of service. Typically, when companies are unable to obtain a meter reading, the bills fall outside of company parameters or for whatever

reason cannot bill the customer for the exact meter reading, the companies will estimate

Staff is unaware of any other Missouri-regulated utility that monthly bills

- the customer's bill to avoid billing customers for more than 35 days of service.
- Q. Is there anything additional regarding the billing error discussion in Item 1 that Staff would like to address?
- A. Yes. It is unlikely that the customer would detect or realize that their bill is being prorated and that the proration is due to the customer being billed for greater than 35 days of service. The formatting of the customer's bill is identical to their other bills, whether it is a bill within or outside of the 26 to 35 days of service. The only manner in which a customer would realize the difference in the prorated charges would be to compare their current monthly bill to a previous month's bill.

In addition, when customers are billed for greater than 35 days of service, it is possible that the customer receives two bills within one calendar month which could be confusing to the customer. Some customers have raised a concern that they might possibly be billed thirteen times within a calendar year. An example of this situation would be a customer that might receive a billing statement with a bill date of August 1 and another billing statement with a bill date of August 29. While it is possible that the customer did not in fact get charged thirteen times, the appearance to the customer that this could occur is troublesome.

Q. Does Staff have an example of the billing error in Item 1 of Staff's Cost of Service Report?

1	A.	Yes, the example is attached to this Testimony as Attachment 1.
2	Q.	What was the billing error in Item 2 of Staff's Cost of Service Report?
3	A.	The billing error in Item 2 stated: "Customers were not billed monthly
4	customer charges".	
5	Q.	Please explain this billing error.
6	A.	Staff noted on some customer bills that the monthly wastewater charge for
7	an area served by the Company was not included on their first month's bill after the	
8	Company acquired the new service territory. Staff is concerned as to the length of time	
9	this error cou	ald have gone undetected had Staff not made the Company aware of the
10	billing error.	Additionally, Staff questioned the first month billing statements of another
11	acquired territory and following a Company audit, the Company determined it was not	
12	billing all of its sewer customers.	
13	Q.	Does Staff have an example of the billing error in Item 2 of Staff's Cost of
14	Service Report?	
15	A.	Yes, the example is attached to this Testimony as Attachment 2.
16	Q.	What was the billing error in Item 3 of Staff's Cost of Service Report?
17	A.	The billing error in Item 3 stated: "Customers were over billed".
18	Q.	Please explain this billing error.
19	A.	The customers in one service territory acquired by MAWC were
20	overcharged	on their first bill for their monthly customer service charge. These
21	customers we	ere billed \$6.95 instead of the tariffed amount of \$5.79. Staff notified the
22	Company of	this billing error and requested that the Company credit these customers

1	\$1.16 on their next monthly bill and to begin accurately charging these customers \$5.7	
2	for their monthly customer service charge.	
3	Also, some of the over billed customers were those customers billed for greate	
4	than 35 days of service on their monthly bill, which was explained in Item 1	
5	As previously stated, since the customers' bills were prorated, Staff determined that the	
6	customers were, in essence, being over billed for being charged for more than 35 day	
7	of service.	
8	Q. Does Staff have an example of the billing error in Item 3 of Staff's Cost	
9	Service Report?	
10	A. Yes, the example is attached to this Testimony as Attachment 3.	
11	Q. What was the billing error in Item 4 of Staff's Cost of Service Report?	
12	A. The billing error in Item 4 stated: "Customers were under billed".	
13	Q. Please explain this billing error.	
14	A. Staff noted on customers' billing statements that were for less that	
15	26 days of service that their monthly water customer charge, water usage charge, monthly	
16	wastewater customer charge and primacy fee were prorated. Since the customers' bill	
17	were prorated, Staff determined that the customers were, in essence, being under billed	
18	for being charged for less than 26 days of service.	
19	Q. Does Staff have an example of the billing error in Item 4 of Staff's Cost	
20	Service Report?	
21	A. Yes, the example is attached to this Testimony as Attachment 4.	
22	Q. What was the billing error in Item 5 of Staff's Cost of Service Report?	

1	A. The billing error in Item 5 stated: "No billing period provided on	
2	billing statements".	
3	Q. Please explain this billing error.	
4	A. Staff noted on some billing statements that no billing period was stated.	
5	Commission Rule 4 CSR 240-13.020(9) states: "Every bill for residential utility service	
6	shall clearly state (A) The beginning and ending meter readings of the billing period and	
7	the dates of these readings". Although the billing statements were for flat rate customers,	
8	the billing statements should reflect the period of time for which the customer is being	
9	billed which would provide clarity for these customers.	
10	Q. Does Staff have an example of the billing error in Item 5 of Staff's Cost of	
11	Service Report?	
12	A. Yes, the example is attached to this Testimony as Attachment 5.	
13	Q. What was the billing error in Item 6 of Staff's Cost of Service Report?	
14	A. The billing error in Item 6 stated: "No meter readings provided on	
15	billing statements".	
16	Q. Please explain this billing error.	
17	A. Staff noted on some billing statements that no meter readings were	
18	provided. The Company informed Staff that when the previous and present	
19	meter readings are all zeros, the fields for the previous and present meter readings	
20	in the Company's billing system will not accept the zero reads. The previous and present	
21	meter reading fields on the billing statement remain blank. Commission Rule	

4 CSR 240-13.020(9)(A) states: "Every bill for residential utility service shall clearly

1 state (A) The beginning and ending meter readings of the billing period and the dates of 2 these readings." 3 Q. Does the Company's practice of not displaying the customer's present and 4 previous meter readings when the readings are zero on the billing statement create 5 any problems? 6 A. The lack of the customer's present and previous meter readings, even if all 7 zeros, could cause confusion to the customer. Additionally, the Company is not adhering 8 to Chapter 13 when it does not display the customer's meter readings on the customer 9 billing statement. 10 Q. Does Staff have an example of the billing error in Item 6 of Staff's Cost of Service Report? 11 12 A. Yes, the example is attached to this Testimony as Attachment 6. 13 Q. What was the billing error in Item 7 of Staff's Cost of Service Report? 14 A. The billing error in Item 7 stated: "Customers were billed on incorrect 15 schedules for water and sewer". 16 Q. Please explain this billing error. 17 A. Customer billing statements in a newly acquired service territory had 18 customers with different rate schedules for water and sewer. Within this same territory, 19 Staff made the Company aware of some customers that were possibly not being charged 20 for sewer service and should be. Staff made the Company aware of its possible 21 inaccurate billing concerns and the Company conducted an audit of the newly acquired 22 service territory. The Company determined that some customers are to be on different

rate schedules for water and sewer and it also determined that some customers were not

1 being billed for sewer charges. The Company has indicated to Staff that it has corrected 2 the billing errors of the customers in this service territory. 3 Q. What were the billing errors in Items 8 and 9 of Staff's Cost of 4 Service Report? 5 A. The billing errors in Items 8 and 9 stated: "Water comparison chart with 6 months not printed, and Water comparison chart with inaccurate previous 7 month's usage". 8 Q. Please explain these billing errors. 9 A. Staff noted on some billing statements that the water usage comparison 10 charts displayed no months and some billing statements that displayed inaccurate previous month's usage on the comparison chart. These errors are not violations of 11 12 Chapter 13, but are errors that could possibly cause confusion to the customer and 13 generate unnecessary calls to the Company's call center. 14 Q. Overall, what are Staff's concerns with MAWC's billing errors on 15 customers' billing statements? 16 A. Staff is aware that billing errors on customers' billing statements will 17 occasionally occur and Staff would anticipate that the Company would respond to any 18 billing errors appropriately and in a timely fashion. An appropriate response to a billing 19 error includes identifying the error, correcting the error and communicating the error and 20 the Company's response to the customer. Staff is concerned that MAWC is not 21 responding appropriately. 22 While Staff has attended the local public hearings and responded to the public 23 comment cards in this case, it continues to hear comments from frustrated customers

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regarding the Company's customer service. Customers have testified and/or informed Staff of the following: 1)"""Incorrect information provided by the call center representatives, 2) customers being informed someone at the Company will return their call and the call not being returned, and 3) customers writing letters to the Company with no responses provided to the customers. Staff's concern is the Company's handling of customer inquiries regarding perceived billing errors on their billing statements.

A number of customers have expressed difficulty when contacting the Company's call center with a billing inquiry and being unable to obtain accurate and complete information. Contacting the Company's call center is the primary method customers use to obtain answers to their billing inquiries. Furthermore, Staff is aware of occurrences where customers have not received promised responses and/or follow-up from the utility including both the call center and responses to customer letters. Such situations can understandably lead to customer concern and frustration as the customer has no other means to obtain information regarding their particular situation. In addition to paying for their water and wastewater charges, customers are paying for quality customer service and are, at a minimum, entitled to accurate information and timely responses when contacting the Company.

Q. Mr. Weeks states in his Rebuttal Testimony, page 11, lines 18 – 24, that, "MAWC should continue the current process. First, by checking the reads and working service orders, we are correcting bills prior to them being sent to the customer. Under Chapter 13, it is permissible to send corrected bills outside the 35 day window. Second, this process is effective in reducing estimated or out of range bills, which likewise results in a reduction in calls and reactive service orders. Thus, the process

presently in place has a positive impact on customer satisfaction and on reducing costs."

Does Staff agree with Mr. Weeks' testimony?

A. No, Staff disagrees. Regarding Mr. Weeks' first issue, Staff asserts that the Company should correctly bill its customers for a period of time not to exceed 35 days of service, Commission Rule 4 CSR 240-13.015(C). It is incumbent upon the Company to bill its customers for no more than 35 days of service. If a billing error occurs on the billing statement that has been rendered to the customer, Chapter 13 allows an exception for a corrected bill. Staff asserts that, without a bill being rendered to the customer, it is not a corrected bill subject to the exception.

Regarding Mr. Weeks' second issue, Staff agrees that the Company's process is effective in reducing estimated bills. Staff asserts that the Company should aim toward providing customer bills within the appropriate billing period per Commission Rule 13, as well as reducing estimated customer bills. Based upon the information Staff has received throughout its review, Staff disagrees that the Company's process has a positive impact on customer satisfaction.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Q. What are Staff's recommendations?
- A. Staff stated its recommendations on pages 18 through 20 of my Rebuttal Testimony. Staff's recommendation are, in addition to the monthly statistical data currently being provided by the Company, that the appropriate Company personnel meet periodically with Staff to discuss customer service issues, call center performance and training, customer billing issues, payment remittance issues and any other issues that Staff determines necessary to discuss. Staff is aware of a variety of customer service,

customer billing and payment remittance issues, and these meetings will hopefully assist Staff in its attempt to ensure that quality service and customer contact resolution is clear and consistent to its customers. Additionally, these meetings between Staff and the Company should also benefit the Company if it continues to acquire additional service territories as these meetings would provide the opportunity for discussion between Staff and the Company should any customer related issues occur in the future. Staff also recommends the following: 1) that the Company provide its Checklist to Staff related to future acquisitions, 2) that the Company create a policy to ensure the estimated usage used for wastewater bills is accurate and 3) that the Company continue its review of the due date printed on bills in conjunction with the implementation of the new Customer Information System (CIS).

- Q. Does this conclude your Surrebuttal Testimony?
- A. Yes, it does.

#### BEFORE THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

#### **OF THE STATE OF MISSOURI**

In the Matter of Missour Company's Request fo Implement A General Rate and Sewer Service Provi Service Areas	r Authority to ) Case No. WR-2011-0337 Increase for Water )		
AFFIDAVIT OF J. KAY NIEMEIER			
STATE OF MISSOURI	) ) ss.		
COUNTY OF COLE	)		
of the foregoing Surrebuttal to be presented in the above given by her; that she has I	Testimony in question and answer form, consisting of pages case; that the answers in the foregoing Surrebuttal Testimony were knowledge of the matters set forth in such answers; and that such o the best of her knowledge and belief.		
D. SUZIE MANKIN  O. SUZIE MANKIN  Notary Public - Notary State of Missouri  Commissioned for Cole Commission Expires: December Commission Number: 084	ore me this day of February, 2012.    Compared to the seal of the seal		

#### **ATTACHMENT 1**

#### HAS BEEN DEEMED

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#### **ATTACHMENT 2**

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#### **ATTACHMENT 4**

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#### **ATTACHMENT 6**

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