

REPORT OF THE STAFF

TO: Missouri Public Service Commission Official Case File
Case No. GR-2009-0434
In the Matter of The Empire District Gas Company of Joplin, Missouri
for Authority to File Tariffs Increasing Rates for Gas Service
Provided to Customers in the Missouri Service Area of the Company.

FROM: Carol (Gay) Fred, Consumer Service Department Manager

DATE: August 11, 2009

/s/ Carol Gay Fred 08/11/09 /s/ Sarah Kliethermes 8/11/09
Consumer Service Department/Date General Counsel's Office/Date

This Report is filed concurrently in Case Nos. GR-2009-0434 and GR-2009-0355.

Staff's Experience with "Comment" Form

Staff would like to report on its recent experience handling Comment cards similar to those proposed in Case No. GR-2009-0434. On July 27, 2009, Consumer Services and Data Center Staff began receiving Comment cards submitted by consumers regarding the rate proposal of Missouri Gas Energy in Case No. GR-2009-0355. Consumer Services Staff, who primarily take complaints, inquiries, and comments from consumers regarding various utility company issues, are certain from our review of the comments being received from consumers that consumers are confused by the form and are unaware of the public nature of the responses to the form, including details requested on the form. Staff's recommended changes for providing customer notice for the upcoming local public hearings in Case No. GR-2009-0434 are indicated in its *Staff Recommendation Regarding Proposed Customer Notice*.

Specific instances giving rise to Staff's conclusion that consumers are confused by the form, and an indication of the impact the receipt of the comment forms are having on Staff, are as follows:

Consumer Confusion

- Consumers have interpreted the language on the form "Request for Public Comment" as a requirement to return the form regardless of any personal comment. Several comment forms have been received from consumers with postage, but without any comments or consumer details included. This is likely attributable to the use of the word "request" on the form.

- Consumers are confused to whom their comments are being sent to, for example;
 - Consumer utility service payments are being included within the comments form.
 - Consumers are resubmitting the portion of the form with the hearing dates, times and location, which may indicate they don't understand the importance of the local public hearing.
 - Consumers are directing their statements to the utility company.
 - Consumers believe they are voting for or against the proposal, by writing in response, "my vote is".
 - Consumers are confused by the language and the proposed rate schedule included on the form, as indicated by statements such as, "how is a person to understand this chart," or "what does this non-gas cost mean, I don't understand what you mean by general operating and maintenance costs."
 - Consumers believe that their comments on the comment form are the same as testifying. Consumers don't understand that unless Public Comments are submitted as evidence in the case, they are not part of the evidentiary record of the case.
 - Consumers do not understand who is the Public Advocate. By statute the Office of the Public Council (OPC) is the public advocate. Although the comment form refers to OPC directly, it is confusing to the consumers why the Comment form is being returned to the Missouri Public Service Commission's Consumer Services Department and not OPC.
- Consumers are unaware that their customer specific information may be made public and viewable by the public, in other words, if they include telephone numbers, email address, account number, bill payments, account statements, bank account information or social security number, the public can view the information via EFIS. Several of these details are requested on the form.

Impact of Receipt of Comments

It appears that Consumers may not be aware of the Commission's existing systems in place to handle their comments which is adding to Staff resource burdens; i.e., local public hearings, Consumer Services hotline, and PSC Info email address as well as their ability to contact Public Counsel by mail, email or phone.

In addition, there are a number of facts regarding the impact that the Comment forms are having on Commission Staff:


- Following is an outline of the Consumer Services Department process for handling public comments:
 - Opens mail and manually date stamps each public comment received on the date received.
 - Reads each public comment and pre-sorts either as a complaint, inquiry, or public comment. Some public comments may consist of a complaint or inquiry and public comment, creating multiple work tasks.
 - If payments are included, Consumer Services Staff must prepare letter to be sent to company and consumer. The Company letter includes the payment remittance and the consumer letter notifies the consumer that payment was directed to the incorrect party however has been sent to the appropriate entity.
 - Hand delivers all pre-sorted Comment forms to Data Center for scanning and submission into EFIS.
 - Public Comments are processed by one Consumer Services Specialist I, one Supervisor, and the Department Manager. Currently, the Consumer Services Department is short one Consumer Services Specialist I. In addition, due to high seasonal workload at this time of year and the higher level of inquiries and complaints generated from the comment forms, Consumer Specialist II's workloads have also increased.
 - Processing public comments by the Consumer Services Department takes an average of five (5) minutes per public comment form, if there is no need to draft letters related to the information contained in the form, i.e., bill payment.
 - Processing public comments by Operations Department also takes an average of five (5) minutes to read and if an issue needs to be addressed takes an average of six (6) hours per comment.
- Following is an outline of the Data Center's process for handling public comments:
 - The Data Center manually date stamps each public comment document received.
 - The public comment documents are scanned in batches (groups of 100 or less).

- Once the batches are scanned, the individual public comments are extracted from the batches into separate electronic files (one file per comment) and saved on a network drive.
- For each public comment, the Data Center staff makes a separate submission into the Commission's Electronic Filing and Information System (EFIS).
- To make the submission, information from the public comments is keyed into EFIS and the corresponding electronic public comment document is attached. Please see the attached screen prints of the submission screen and the attachment screen, included as Schedule 1.
- Upon submission, EFIS generates a tracking number. The tracking number is manually recorded on the original paper document.
- The original paper document is then placed in a scanned documents folder and stored in the Data Center.
- Public comments are processed by three Senior Office Support Assistants in the Data Center.
- Processing public comments takes an average of two minutes of staff time per public comment.
- Staff has several systems in place for addressing customer complaints and inquiries. However, as indicated above, the comment cards do not dovetail well with these systems.
 - Responses with comments such as "I don't understand" do not provide Consumer Services Staff with enough information to identify what sort of confusion the customer is experiencing, much less to attempt to resolve that confusion. If a customer calls, or attends a Question and Answer session, the Staff can engage in dialogue with the customer to address confusion and concerns. Similarly, if a customer uses the EFIS submission screen, the customer is asked to include information necessary for Staff to respond.
 - The Question and Answer sessions held prior to Local Public Hearings are ideal for explaining the rate request to consumers, and answering any questions they might have. The comment card public notices provide some details of the rate request, but do not adequately explain the rate requests. If the Commission would like to move towards providing more detailed information in the public notice, the more comprehensive Information Sheets provided by the Companies at Local Public Hearings would likely be more appropriate.

To date, the Staff has received three thousand one hundred and ninety nine (3,199) written public comments and four hundred ninety-six (496) verbal comments in Case No. GR-2009-0355. At this time, only approximately one-third of MGE's customers have received the comment forms. To date Staff has received 30 times the number of responses it typically receives.

Staff's recommended changes to alleviate some of the concerns identified above are indicated in its *Staff Recommendation Regarding Proposed Customer Notice*, filed in Case No. GR-2009-0434.

Should the Commission order use of comment cards forms in this case that are directed to Staff, Staff will likely request the Commission's consent to hire temporary staff to assist in the handling of comment forms and the necessary overtime to keep current on the handling of the comment forms.

 **SESSION TIMEOUT WARNING:** Please be advised that when logged into EFIS, your EFIS session will time out (expire) after 20 minutes of inactivity. If your session times out, you will be returned to the logon screen (even if you were able to continue typing text or making entries on the screen). In addition, any data or attachments awaiting submission will be lost.

Your comments are appreciated and will be placed in an official file of the Missouri Public Service Commission. However, if you are currently experiencing a problem with your service, you may submit a complaint by clicking on this [Complaint/Inquiry Screen](#) hyperlink

* Required Fields

* First Name

Middle Initial

* Last Name

* Street Address

Mailing Address
(If different from above)

* City

* State

MO



Zip

County

Select



Phone

-

-

Ext -

E-Mail

Utility Type

Select



Utility Company Name

Select



Case/Tracking No.

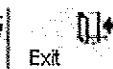
Please refer to a case number if applicable.

* Public Comments


(The above comment field allows only 500 characters. Please attach a separate file, if needed.)

SI.No.

Attachment(s)



Schedule 1

 **SESSION TIMEOUT WARNING:** Please be advised that when logged into EFIS, your EFIS session will time out (expire) after 20 minutes of inactivity. If your session times out, you will be returned to the logon screen (even if you were able to continue typing text or making entries on the screen). In addition, any data or attachments awaiting submission will be lost.

DISCLAIMER: It is the sole responsibility of the person or entity submitting a “public” version of the electronic document file (s), not the Missouri Public Service Commission (MoPSC), to take appropriate measures to ensure that any hidden embedded “proprietary” and “highly confidential” information is to the best of his or her knowledge, information and belief, non-viewable non-searchable and non-reversible. Informal consumer complaints and the attachments to such complaints are automatically considered highly confidential. Only the Public Service Commission, its staff and the utility against which the complaint is being filed have access to the information entered or attached. (Please review declaration page)

Attachment Process:


- 1: Click Browse to select the document from your local/Network drive or type the path to the document.
- 2: Click "Attach" button (Repeat Step 1 and Step 2 if you wish to attach more than one document to this submission).
- 3: Click "Done With Attach" button when you are done attaching document(s) for this submission.


Note: Be aware that large documents can be difficult to view. Please break them up into smaller attachments for the convenience of the viewer(s).


Browse...

Attachment(s)

Delete

 Attach

 Done with Attach

 Delete

BEFORE THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION
OF THE STATE OF MISSOURI


In the matter of The Empire District Gas Company)
of Joplin, Missouri for Authority to File Tariffs)
Increasing Rates for Gas Service Provided to)
Customers in the Missouri Service Area of the)
Company.)

Case No. GR-2009-0434
Tariff No. YG-2009-0855

AFFIDAVIT OF CAROL GAY FRED

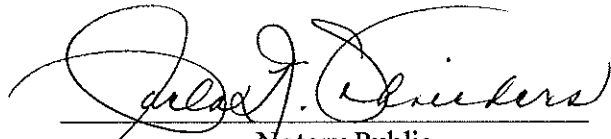
STATE OF MISSOURI)
)
) ss
COUNTY OF COLE)

Carol Gay Fred, of lawful age, on her oath states: that she has knowledge of the matters set forth, in the Report of Staff; and that such matters are true to the best of her knowledge and belief.



Carol Gay Fred

Subscribed and sworn to me before this 11th day of August, 2009.



Notary Public

My commission expires August 25, 2012

CARLA K. SCHNIEDERS Notary Public - Notary Seal State of Missouri Commissioned for Cole County My Commission Expires: August 25, 2012 Commission Number: 08533187
--