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RCA CONSUMER E-NEWS



Consumer Protection & Information Section Regulatory Commission of Alaska

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WHAT'S IN YOUR WATER

Ever wondered what's in your tap water? Or what happens to the dirty water from your shower, toilet, laundry, or dirty dishes after it goes down the drain? A few RCA staff learned quite a bit when they toured the Anchorage Water & Wastewater Utility (AWWU) treatment facilities this fall.



AWWU's infrastructure includes 1,600 miles of buried water and sewer pipelines, as well as many valves, pump stations, wellhouses, and treatment facilities. It delivers an average of 8 billion gallons of water from Eklutna Lake and other pristine sources, and collects and treats nearly 30 million gallons of sewage each day to protect public health.

AWWU is required to meet various standards, laws, regulations, as well as industry principles and practices to ensure safe drinking water and sanitary sewer within the Municipality of Anchorage. To learn more, check out AWWU's plans and reports at awwu.biz.

Did you know you can access information about public water systems in Alaska and drinking water test results online? Visit the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation's Drinking Water Program at dec/Alaska.gov/eh/. Federal regulations of water quality standards can be accessed through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency website at epa.gov.

PROTECT YOUR FAMILY FROM CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING

According to the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention, every year 400 Americans die from exposure to carbon monoxide. Winter can be an especially dangerous time due to space heaters, generators, and other portable heating devices that can leak carbon monoxide. In August, a 10-year-old child died of suspected carbon monoxide poisoning from a propane powered appliance; and in October, a 49-year-old Interior Alaska man believed to have died from a carbon monoxide leak from a gas generator. You can prevent carbon monoxide exposure by following these safety tips.

- Install battery-operated carbon monoxide alarms or detectors with battery backup in your home, and check or replace the battery when you change the time on your clocks each spring and fall.
- Have your home heating systems, water heater, and any other gas, oil, or coal-burning appliances inspected and serviced annually by a trained service technician.
- Never use a portable generator, charcoal grill, camp stove, or other gasoline or charcoal-burning device inside your home, basement, or garage, even if doors and windows are open.
- Know the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning: headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, sleepiness, and confusion. If you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning, get outside to fresh air immediately, and then call 911.

TELECOM CORNER

FCC Approves New Rules to Aid in Tracking Threatening Phone Calls

In Washington, DC, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) recently approved new rules to aid in tracking threatening phone calls. Previously, when a school, religious center, or other private organization received threatening calls, they had to request a specific waiver from the FCC to obtain the blocked caller ID information. The FCC's new rules will now allow law enforcement and specified security personnel to access information, enabling quicker investigation and empowering them to more effectively combat threatening calls.

For more information visit the FCC website at www.fcc.gov and look up CC Docket No. 91-281.

BROADBAND INTERNET

"The future belongs to the connected. No matter who you are or where you live in this country you need access to modern communications for a fair shot at 21st century success."

-- Jessica Rosenworcel, FCC Commissioner
October 25, 2017

Energy and Commerce Committee
Hearing on the Oversight of the Federal
Communications Commission

According to the FCC, 34 million Americans lack access to high-speed internet service. This number includes 23 million Americans living in rural areas. So where does Alaska stand?

As part of House Bill 57, which established the state government-operating budget for Fiscal Year 2018, the legislature instructed the RCA to file a report by December 1, 2017, an analysis of broadband coverage and expansion plans in Alaska.

The RCA's legislative report, available in Docket [I-17-004](#), is a culmination of many hours of work by the RCA staff with input from telecom industry, consumers, and other stakeholders. Included in the report are various mapping sources, and several exhibits that demonstrate current and planned broadband projects, as well as private studies that were conducted recently to assess the estimated cost of providing potential access to broadband Internet service to most if not all parts of Alaska using a variety of technologies. Read full report here: Docket [I-17-004](#).

According to U.S. Energy Information Administration, as much as \$6 billion worth of electricity is stolen annually



Photo Courtesy of Alaska Electric Light & Power Company

POWER THEFT

Power theft is not just a crime; it is also extremely dangerous. If you are on the same power line as someone who is stealing electricity, you could pay the cost for the theft too. The power line could become overloaded with electric energy, which could harm your electronics and appliances that are designed to receive a certain, steady amount of electricity. Power theft makes utility service less reliable and lower in quality for paying customers.

Making sure utility personnel are regularly checking signs of power bypass and tampering, are standard procedures for many electric utilities. You can also help prevent power theft through basic detective work and simply paying attention to see if there is any suspicious activity or meter tampering.

Examine the area around any electrical outlets, cables, and conduits outside of your house, including porches and garages. Make sure to use lockable outlet covers for outdoor outlets or turn off the breaker to these outlets when not in use. Follow the cables or conduits leading to your house for any signs of tampering or questionable cables leading from them.

Meters and electrical boxes outside of your house should have a security tag. This is usually a looped wire secured with a plastic case about the size of a small padlock or a key chain. If the seal is broken or missing, someone may have been tampering with your electricity. If you live in a multi-family building, turn off all the power in your house using the main disconnect beside the breaker box or fuse box and then go outside to examine your electric meter. If it has not stopped, your meter may be crossed with another unit in the building.

Review your electric bills for unusually high usage. Keep in mind there may be seasonal variations in your bill like a usage spike in the cold winter months or recent changes in utility rates. Contact your electric company to discuss possible variations in your bill or if you suspect someone tapped into your electric lines.

CONSUMER COMPLAINT STANDARDS

Electric, natural gas, telephone, water, wastewater, and refuse services are critical services that most Alaskans rely on daily. Regulated utility companies have immense responsibilities to ensure residential and business customers receive adequate, safe, and reliable service at just and reasonable rates. In investigating an informal complaint, consumer protection and information staff uses the following standards to determine the merits of the complaint.

Unreasonable

In an informal investigation, "unreasonable" means that the utility:

- adopted and followed a procedure in providing utility service that is inconsistent with its RCA-approved tariff;
- adopted and followed a procedure that defeats the complainant's valid application for a right or program benefit (e.g., Lifeline and Link Up Program); or
- placed the complainant at a disadvantage relative to all others through actions inconsistent with RCA statutes and regulations.

Unfair

In an informal investigation, "unfair" means that the utility:

- failed to provide the complainant adequate and reasonable notice of the matter at issue;
- acted without regard to pertinent facts or circumstances; or
- was inconsistent in its application of standards or principles in making the decision.

Inefficient

In an informal investigation, "inefficient" means the utility:

- exceeded a time limit established by a tariff provision, statute, regulation, good judgment, sound administrative practice, or decent regard for the rights or interests of the complainant or the general public; or
- mishandled the decision-making process or the process of implementing an act or service through delay, "red tape," or by requiring an unreasonable and unnecessary amount of clarification from the complainant.

Unsafe

In an informal investigation, "unsafe" means the utility failed to use reasonable care in providing service or acted without regard to the safety of the complainant, utility customers, or utility employees.

Discriminatory

In an informal investigation, "discriminatory" means that the utility discriminated against the complainant by making or granting an unreasonable preference or advantage or subject the complainant to unreasonable prejudice or disadvantage.

Contrary to Law

In an informal investigation, "contrary to law" means that the utility:

- did not comply with statutory or regulatory requirements;
- misinterpreted or misapplied a statute, regulation, or comparable requirement; or
- failed to follow RCA statutes and regulations or comply with RCA orders.

If you have a complaint with a utility provider that you are unable to resolve, an informal complaint may be filed with the RCA via [email](#), [fax](#), [online](#), or [in person](#).



Cost-Saving Energy Tips for the Holidays

Holidays are an exciting time – decorating, holiday dinners, gift-buying, errands to do, or maybe a skiing vacation. Consider these energy saving tips to try and help you keep your energy bill down during the holidays.

Use Lighting Fixtures Less

If you have decorated with a lot of holiday lights, you may not need to use your lamps and other permanent lighting fixtures quite as much.

And of course, remember to use light-emitting diode (LED) lights. According to [U.S. Department of Energy](#), LED holiday lights consume far less electricity and last longer than incandescent lights. Fiber optic lighting decorations are also a good choice as they usually omit a large amount of color and light with only one bulb. A timer can be purchased and attached to the lights to limit the amount of energy consumed. You can also opt for decorations that do not require energy including bright colorful garlands and wreaths.

Entertain Efficiently

If family or friends are visiting, give your heating system a break. Turn down your thermostat a few degrees as the extra body heat will naturally warm the home. Take advantage of the Alaskan winter sun by opening window blinds or drapes to heat your cabin but be sure to close them when it gets dark out to help cut heat loss. Remove furniture, boxes, and clutter that get in the way of air flowing from the vents. You can also turn down your water heater to a lower temperature to help save a little money with extra guests.

When cooking or baking, you can bake multiple dishes at once in the oven; it takes the same amount of energy to heat an empty oven as it does an oven with multiple dishes inside. If you use glass or ceramic pans, try turning your oven temperature down 25 degrees. Your dish may cook just as quickly. When cooking on your stovetop, match the size of the pan to the heating element. More heat will get to the pan and less will be lost.

Before Winter Travel

If you are taking a vacation, remember to unplug your electronics and appliances to save on phantom energy consumption.

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