



Spring Ahead



Sunday, March 11, 2018

RCA CONSUMER E-NEWS

SPRING ISSUE

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Before you start working on your fence or any yard projects

Know the Ground Rules



Dig Safe – Dig Smart

<http://akonecall.com>

NATIONAL CONSUMER PROTECTION WEEK



...Pass it ON

This information is *valuable.*
To YOU – and other people.

IdentityTheft.gov

Recovering from identity theft is easier with a plan.

Can Utility Companies Do That?

Can the utility company turn off my heat for unpaid bills during cold winter months?

Unfortunately, Alaska does not have a cold winter moratorium law (see [R-95-001](#)). Utility service may be shutoff if your account is delinquent. If you receive a shutoff notice, please do not ignore it. Contact your utility to see if you can work out a payment plan.

If your home is occupied by a person seriously ill, elderly, with disability, or dependent on life support systems, you should notify the utility immediately.

If you need financial assistance, contact the Heating Assistance Program (HAP) at 1-800-470-3058. HAP assists households with income at or below 150% of the federal poverty income guidelines, who have a minimum of \$200 in out-of-pocket heating costs per year, and meet all other eligibility criteria. For more information, visit the HAP website at: <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dpa/Pages/hap/default.aspx>.

You may also call 2-1-1. The 2-1-1 operators provide free information on emergency food and shelter, health care, counseling, senior service, and more.

You might also consider enrolling into a Budget Billing, where the utility company averages your last 12 billing periods so you can pay the same amount for your energy service each month, despite seasonal variability.

Can a utility hold me responsible for an electric bill that is not in my name?

Many utility tariffs include a provision on former indebtedness. If you share a home with another adult who has an old debt with the utility, the company may collect that old debt. If the service is disconnected for non-payment, the utility may refuse service to the location until the old debt is fully paid.

Sometimes the questions are complicated and the answers are simple.

- Dr. Seuss

Can a utility company enter my property without my permission?

Utility companies may visit your property from time to time to read and maintain meters. You must make the meter accessible by keeping it free and clear from any obstruction that a utility representative may encounter at your residence. If there are obstacles in the way, please remove them.

Additionally, the electric service, safety, and performance standards set out in [3 AAC 52.450](#) states that a utility may disconnect service for: knowing and continued failure of the customer to provide the utility with reasonable access to its meters, equipment, or property.

I recently found out that my meter was crossed with another unit in my apartment building and I have been paying for my neighbor's usage. What can I do to recoup the bills I overpaid?

In general, for each individual meter in a multi-family apartment, the customer, developer, landlord or property manager is responsible for identifying the specific unit being served on each meter base or meter base socket. If the utility becomes aware of a meter crossed with another unit, corrected billings may occur with the current billing cycle and apply on a going-forward basis. If you are not satisfied with the utility's attempt to resolve the billing issue, you may contact the RCA's Consumer Protection & Information Section.

How to Stay Informed



There are several ways to stay connected to what's going on at the RCA.

Subscribe to RCA's Listserv

You can sign up for our listserv and receive emails for natural gas, pipeline, refuse, telephone, electric, water and wastewater utilities, and other RCA information through the State of Alaska's Listserv through this link: <http://list.state.ak.us/>.

If you wish to receive news releases and consumer e-news, email the RCA's Consumer Protection & Information Section at cp.mail@alaska.gov.

Potential Acquisition of ML&P

You may have heard that in December 2017, the Municipality of Anchorage announced its proposal to sell the Municipal Light & Power Department (ML&P) to Chugach Electric Association, Inc. (Chugach). During the city election next month, voters will be asked whether to approve the sale.

So what are the next steps for ML&P and Chugach if voters approve the sale?

Both utilities have to submit an appropriate application under Alaska Statutes [42.05.221 - .281](#), *Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity*, to the RCA.

What are the criteria for RCA approval?

In general, the RCA determines if the applicant(s) is “fit, willing and able.” This means the RCA looks at the technical, managerial, and financial competence of the company. The RCA may also investigate the effect the controlling interest will have on the utility’s fitness and whether the transfer is consistent with public convenience and necessity.

Will there be an opportunity for the public to comment on the filing?

Yes, by law the RCA is required to issue a notice of the filing and allow public comments. Comment periods typically last 30 days.

Can I talk directly to one of the RCA Commissioners regarding the utilities’ filing?

Unfortunately, you may not. Any communication with individual commissioners, presiding officer, or commission staff member on material issues in matters pending before the commission may constitute a prohibited ex parte communication ([3 AAC 48.020\(g\)](#)). If you wish to comment on the record on a pending matter, please submit your comments to rca.mail@alaska.gov.

What is the timeline for the RCA’s review process?

First, the RCA has to determine if the application is complete. Once deemed complete, the RCA has 180 days (approximately six months) to issue a final order.



Anchorage Bowl Electric Utility Service Areas

What is the status of ML&P’s rate increase request?

The RCA held an evidentiary hearing on ML&P’s rate increase request that lasted nearly five weeks in December 2017. The RCA will issue a final decision on this matter on or before March 25, 2018. The RCA’s docket files ([U-17-008](#)) contain all documents associated with the rate case, including pre-filed testimony, hearing transcripts, and comments received on the rate case.

RCA Complaint Form



The RCA’s Consumer Protection & Information Section recently launched a new consumer complaint form for consumers to submit their utility complaints.

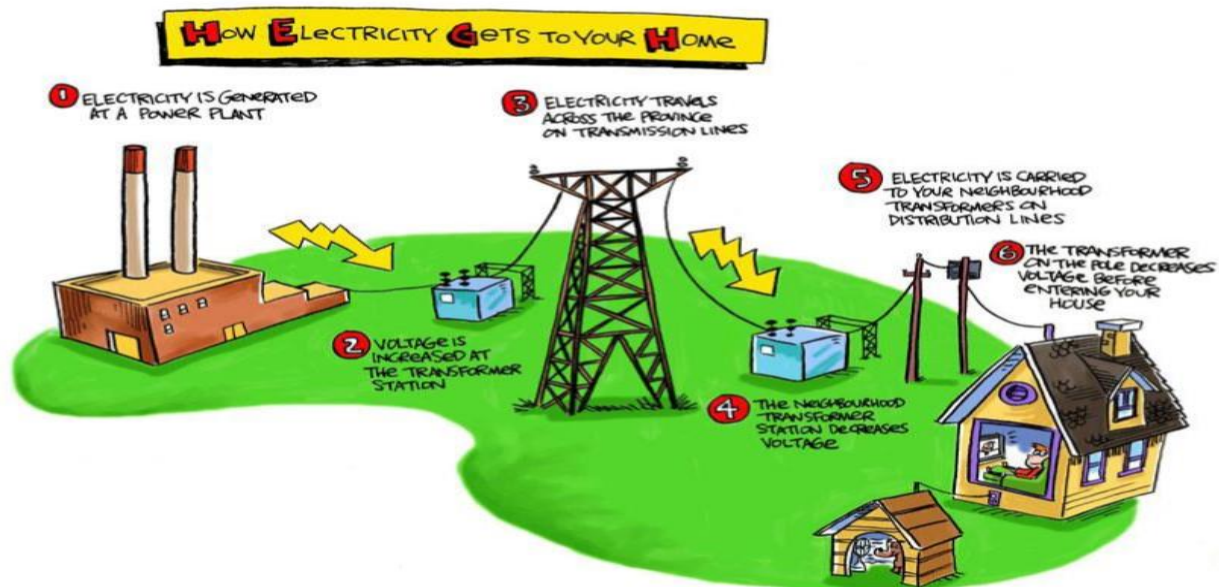
The complaint form, available [in PDF](#) and through the consumer [complaint portal](#) on the RCA website, is easy to use and gives consumers the ability to state their complaints in detail.

Hearing utility complaints is critical in letting regulators know how consumers are being treated, so we can ensure the utilities are providing adequate, safe, and reliable utility services. Consumers with general questions about utilities or questions about how the RCA works can contact staff at (907) 276-6222 (1-800-390-2782 outside Anchorage) or send an email to cp.mail@alaska.gov.

Natural Disasters & Power Outages

We have come to expect that when the power goes out it will be restored within a few hours. But what about when natural disasters strike like an earthquake, avalanche, fire, volcano eruption, flood, or a gas or power plant explosion? Such devastating events can cause major damage to the power lines and longer outages can occur.

Here is some information about some of the lines that transmit electricity to your home.



Transmission Lines: High voltage lines that move bulk electricity from a generating plant to an electrical substation. A problem with one of these lines could interrupt power to several customers.

Substations: Electrical facilities that contain equipment for switching or regulating the voltage of electricity. A problem within a substation could interrupt power to customers served from that substation.

Main Distribution Lines: These lines carry voltage power to distribution transformers located near the customer premises.

Individual Service Drop: The line that runs from the transformer to your meter. A problem here would only affect the electric service to an individual customer while the remaining system would still have electric service.

Important Safety Reminder:

- Customers are reminded to avoid downed power lines at all times. While some energized wires spark and snap, others may not appear dangerous but they are.
- Take special care to look for wires before clearing trees or debris, and avoid any metal object making contact with a hot wire, even some distance away.
- Parents are urged to remind their children not to touch or go near any wire they may see on the ground.
- Take necessary steps to prepare for an emergency in the event of a disaster. Visit <http://www.ready.alaska.gov>.

Reliability and Security Standards and Practices of Alaska Electric Utilities

In May 2016, the RCA opened an informational docket ([I-16-002](#)) to receive comments and information involving the evaluation of the reliability and security standards and practices of Alaska electric utilities. The goal is to address growing concerns about the need for stronger, enforceable reliability standards and for enhanced measures to improve operational, physical, and cyber security of Alaska’s electric utility systems.

The RCA received several responses and held a technical conference earlier this year to discuss efforts by the GDS Associates, Inc.; Alaska Intertie Management Committee; Alaska Railbelt Cooperative Transmission and Electric Company, Inc.; and several other electric utilities and stakeholders.



Copies of the comments, filings, and transcripts from the technical conference can be downloaded from the RCA’s website at rca.alaska.gov by typing “[I-16-002](#)” into the Find a Matter search box.

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