

Consumer e-News

RCA Consumer Protection &
Information Section

March 2017



Avoiding Utility Bill Scam

Hundreds of utility customers nationwide reported paying money to scammers. Alaska is no exception. Energy and telecommunications companies in Alaska have received numerous reports from their customers about fake utility bill collectors demanding payment immediately and threatening that service will be disconnected.

To safeguard personal information of customers, utility companies follow various privacy protection rules. Those rules include the Alaska Personal Information Protection Act, also known as the [APIPA rules](#), and, for telecommunications service providers, the Customer Proprietary Network Information ([CPNI](#)) rules of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Generally, utility companies do not arbitrarily call their customers and ask for personal information since they have already collected it at the time customers signed up for service.

If your account is delinquent, the utility company will provide you a written notice. If you receive a call from an Interactive Voice Response or IVR system, make sure it is not a fake utility bill collector: hang up and contact your utility company immediately at the phone number listed on your utility bill.

Protecting Yourself from Scams

- Never share your personal information, including date of birth, social security number, or credit card and bank account information.
- Contact your utility company and establish a Personal Identification Number (PIN) or password.
- Do not accept offers from anyone, including those claiming to be utility employees, to pay your bill or provide any other service for a fee.
- Do not assume the name and number on your caller ID are legitimate (caller IDs can be spoofed).
- If you suspect a scam call, hang up, contact your utility at the number on your utility bill, and report the incident to authorities.



RCA Consumer Protection Staff

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Regulatory Commission of Alaska

rca.alaska.gov

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Outside Anchorage (800) 390-2782

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Fax: (907) 276-0160

Email: cp.mail@alaska.gov

Utility Facilities

Part of the RCA's role is to ensure that utilities provide safe and reliable utility services to the public. Below are some of the utility facilities that consumer protection staff visited in Kenai.



Cook Inlet Natural Gas Storage of Alaska (Photo by Josh Martinez)

On March 11, 2017, a consumer protection staff member visited ENSTAR Natural Gas in Soldotna. Staff also toured the CINGSA facility in Kenai. CINGSA, which began service in the Spring of 2012, is the first commercial natural gas storage facility in Alaska. CINGSA helps ensure adequate gas supply to Alaskans by storing gas during the summer months, when available supply exceeds demand. The storage gas is then available for withdrawal during the winter months to supplement the deliverability of available gas supply.



Staff also visited the Homer Electric Association (HEA) and its Combined Cycle Plant in Nikiski. In January 2014, HEA began generating its own power. The facility features a steam turbine in conjunction with an existing natural gas turbine to produce a total of 80 megawatts power.

The steam turbine uses waste heat to create enough steam to produce 18 megawatts of power without using any additional natural gas.



HEA Nikiski Facilities



Power Dispatch is located at the facility and controls the power generation to match member load and maintains the interconnected system frequency.

For more information about these facilities, visit www.cingsa.com and www.homerelectric.com.

Telecom Corner

The RCA regulates some but not all telephone companies in Alaska. The RCA regulates intrastate (within Alaska) local and long distance telephone services. The RCA also determines whether a telephone company is eligible to receive state and federal universal service funds as an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier (ETC).

When a telephone company has been designated an ETC, it must provide Lifeline service and may offer the Link-up.



The Lifeline Program provides discounts on recurring monthly phone or broadband service charges, where broadband service is provided. Additional features, beyond the basic services, are not covered by Lifeline. Only one subsidized service is allowed per household. It can be a landline, wireless, or broadband service, but only one. **Link-up** provides a one-time discount on the activation or installation of a landline or wireless telephone for income-eligible households.

To apply for Lifeline & Link-up, consumers should contact a local telephone company that provides landline, wireless, or broadband service in their area, and request an application for Lifeline service.

For more information, visit www.lifelinesupport.org.

Outreach & Education

Utilities may be a concern for many households and businesses. Whether it is a question about a bill, needing information about assistance programs, or wanting to know about how to save money, many Alaskans are unsure of the available resources.

As the agency that regulates public utility services, consumer protection staff provide Alaskans with helpful information on a variety of utility issues.



AHFC Home Choice Seminar

During this first quarter, consumer protection staff actively participated in a number of outreach and education events such as the Anchorage Downtown Business Partnership monthly membership meeting and the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation's Home Choice seminars in Anchorage, Kenai, and Mat-Su.

Staff also partnered with the Alaska Attorney General's Office and the Better Business Bureau and provided a consumer summit on fraud, scams, and unfair and deceptive business practices.



Consumer Forum for Alaskans

Regulatory Commission of Alaska

RCA's core services include issuing certificates for public utilities and pipelines, regulating the rates charged by certificated entities and evaluating the tariff rules and charges of a regulated company, verifying the quarterly cost of power pass-through charges to consumers from electric and natural gas utilities, adjudicating disputes between ratepayers and regulated entities, managing emerging competitive markets, providing consumer protection services to utility ratepayers, developing regulations, and performing financial review for Alaska's power cost equalization (PCE) program.

Navigating the RCA Website



The commission's website, which is www.rca.alaska.gov, includes the commission's regulatory decisions, notice of public rulemaking and utility filings, and helpful information for consumers.

Top Searches

- ▶ Issued Orders (30 Days)
- ▶ Recent Documents (30 Days)
- ▶ All Open Utility Dockets
- ▶ All Open Tariff Matters
- ▶ All Open Pipeline Dockets
- ▶ All Open Rule-making Dockets
- ▶ Find a Certificate
Certificate Number? Go
- ▶ Find an Entity (Company)
Entity? Go
- ▶ Find a Matter
Matter Number? Go
Examples: U-06-002
TA758-2

Researching a specific case (if the docket number is known) is straightforward and can be done by typing the docket number in the "Find a Matter" box.

RCA docket files contain all the documents associated with that case. For example, a rate case often involves several interested parties who file comments and a formal hearing with exhibits and testimony.

When researching a specific topic within a number of cases, such as the "Cook Inlet Natural Gas Storage" or "CINGSA", there is an [Advanced Search](#) feature under the "RCA Library" tab, which accepts Boolean connectors and will direct you to relevant cases.

When searching for all matters about a specific utility company, simply enter the company name in the "Find an Entity" box.

Filing Comments

Public comments may be submitted during an open comment period on the RCA website located at the top right of the webpage entitled [View Public Notices & Submit Comments](#).

Public Information

- ▶ View Public Notices & Submit Comments
- ▶ File an Informal Complaint
- ▶ Regulatory Affairs & Public Advocacy
- ▶ Utility Rate Information

Your Rights & Responsibilities as a Utility Customer



As a utility customer, you have many important rights and responsibilities to ensure fair dealings between you and your utility service provider. The following highlights your rights regarding billing, credit, dispute and disconnection practices.

These rights and responsibilities include your right to:

- Safe and reliable utility service
- A clear and concise bill
- Know how your bill is calculated
- Question or disagree with the utility service provider
- Fair credit and deposit policies
- File a complaint with the Regulatory Commission of Alaska

You have the responsibility to:

- Pay your bill on time
- Provide the utility access to its meter
- Provide advance notice before you move or wish to have service disconnected

If you have a complaint that you are unable to resolve with your utility service provider, contact the RCA Consumer Protection & Information staff and provide:

- Facts relative to the origin, nature, and basis of the complaint
- Information about attempts to resolve the complaint, either orally or in writing
- Available supporting documents, such as billing and payment history

Consumer protection officers are available Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. by phone at (907) 276-6222, 1-800-390-2782 (outside Anchorage), by email at cp.mail@alaska.gov, or by visiting the RCA offices located at 701 West 8th Avenue, Suite 300, Anchorage (ConocoPhillips South Tower building in downtown). An online complaint form is also available at: <http://rca.alaska.gov/RCAWeb/ForConsumers/SubmitInformalComplaint.aspx>. Staff will try to resolve an informal complaint *only* if the complainant has, in fact, taken the complaint to the utility service provider.

A party who is not satisfied with an informal resolution made by the commission's consumer protection section may file a request for action under the alternative dispute resolution procedures set out in 3 AAC [48.121](#) or under the formal complaint procedures set out in 3 AAC [48.130](#). In determining whether to grant the request, the commission will apply the good cause standard set out in 3 AAC [48.130\(f\)](#). If the commission institutes a formal proceeding, the entire informal file will be transferred to the file of the formal proceeding as provided for under 3 AAC [48.060\(g\)](#).

Upcoming Events



The Western Conference of Public Service Commissioners is a regional association within the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners. Its annual conference provides an excellent forum to discuss and share ideas on topics that are relevant to today's utility regulators. For more information and to register online, please visit www.western.naruc.org.

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