



BRADLEY LAKE DAM, courtesy of Homer Electric Association, Inc.

RCA Consumer e-News

September 2017

CONSUMER PROTECTION & INFORMATION

RCA Chairman



Each year, the Regulatory Commission of Alaska (RCA) elects a Chairman for a one-year term. Upon election, the Chairman assumes responsibility for administrative functions of the RCA, becomes the policy spokesperson, assigns dockets, and coordinates public meeting activities in addition to shouldering commissioner docket work.

On June 14, 2017, Commissioner Stephen McAlpine was unanimously elected as Chairman of the RCA for fiscal year 2018 that began July 1 and ends June 30, 2018.

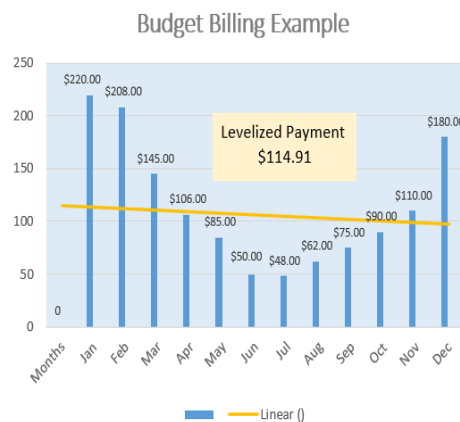
Chairman McAlpine was appointed by Governor Bill Walker to the RCA for a six-year term beginning March 1, 2015. McAlpine was raised in Washington State. He is a graduate of the University of Washington and the Seattle University School of Law. Chairman McAlpine came to Alaska in 1970 and settled in Valdez, Alaska.

While living in Valdez, he was elected to the city council and was twice elected as Mayor. In 1982, he was elected to his first of two terms as Alaska's Lieutenant Governor.

Congratulations, Chairman McAlpine!

Budget Billing

Avoid seasonal highs and lows: contact your electric or natural gas service provider and ask about Budget Billing to levelize your monthly payment.



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Cost of Power & Gas Cost Adjustments

In the [June 2017 Consumer e-News](#), we covered information about how the RCA reviews a utility's request to change its base rates. Your energy bills also include other rates that are authorized by the RCA. These are called the cost of power adjustment (COPA) and gas cost adjustment (GCA).



COPA is a separate line item on each electric bill statement which reflects increases/decreases in the electric utility company's fuel and purchased power costs. Electric utilities submit their COPA filings with the RCA in accordance with [3 AAC 52.504](#). In the filing, the utilities must include supporting documentation as required by 3 AAC 52.504(g) which includes copies of invoices for costs recovered through the COPA; reports on generation, sales, station service, and economy energy sales; support of projected costs and sales for the future period; and revised tariff sheets.

Most electric utilities adjust their COPAs quarterly. COPA filings that do not include new cost elements may be implemented immediately upon filing with the RCA. The COPA filing is subject to subsequent review, adjustment, and approval by the RCA. If the COPA surcharge, for example is .02420 and 550 kWh, was used during a billing period, the COPA would be a charge of \$13.31 on the bill.

Similarly, **GCA** is a mechanism for gas utilities to recover gas costs. The requirements for GCA calculation are outlined in [3 AAC 52.505](#).

For example, in southcentral Alaska, ENSTAR Natural Gas Company (ENSTAR) calculates and submits its GCA annually. For July 1, 2017, through June 30, 2018, ENSTAR increased its GCA surcharge from \$0.738110 per ccf to \$0.82416 per ccf. Residential customers will see approximately an \$8.61 increase to a customer bill of 100 ccf from the increase in the GCA.

Without a COPA or GCA mechanism, a utility's base rates would be constantly changing to reflect increases and decreases in the cost of power and gas.

Fun Facts

Telecom



Since the invention of the telephone in 1876, the first phone book came out in 1878 and was apparently only 20 pages. The first phone booth debuted in the early 1900s.

Fast forward to 2010, two major phone companies in Alaska – Alaska Communications Systems, Inc. and GCI Communications Corp. (GCI) – started decommissioning their public payphones statewide. The fast growth of cellphones made it easy to find a teenager these days who has never had to use a phone booth. In 2014, phone companies in Alaska were no longer required to publish phone directories.

Energy

The record high temperature in Alaska was 100 degrees Fahrenheit at Fort Yukon in 1915. The record low temperature was -79.8 degrees Fahrenheit at Prospect Creek Camp in 1971.



Imagine the cost to bring heating oil or use diesel fuel in those communities at the time.

In 1948, Chugach Electric Association, Inc. was incorporated in Alaska. Six decades later, in 2012, the first Wind Farm, Fire Island owned by Cook Inlet Region, Inc., began feeding 11 turbines into the Anchorage electrical grid.



Pipeline

In 1975, construction began on Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS). By the summer of 1977, TAPS was completed and oil began to flow.



Happy 40th TAPS!

Alaska Relay Service

Sprint Communications Company L.P. and its associate, the Assistive Technology of Alaska (ATLA), provided the RCA an [overview](#) of their budget cycle and some of the program that they are working on now and the future of the Alaska relay system and services. For example, they introduced the iPad Pilot Program that will help increase and ensure access to telecommunications for people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech disabled. For more information, click on: [2017 Alaska Relay Updates and 2018 Planning](#).



Abbreviated Dialing Codes to Know

2-1-1 Whether you live in Anchorage or at the top of world in Barrow, Alaska, 211 is your one-stop resource for connecting with a variety of resources in your community. The 211 operators provide free information on emergency food and shelter, health care, counseling, senior service, and more.

4-1-1 Commonly known as “D.A.,” “Directory Assistance,” “Information,” or “Operator” has been used for decades. In the 1972 “Operator” song by Jim Croce, the lyric runs “Operator, well could you help me place this call? See, the number on the matchbook is old and faded...”

6-1-1 Is the abbreviated dialing telephone number used to report a problem with a telephone service or to reach a telephone service provider to make a payment.

7-1-1 Is used for the Telecommunications Relay Service for people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have speech loss and wish to communicate with a hearing person who uses a standard telephone.

8-1-1 Always call 811 at least two days before you dig to get free locates of underground utility lines.

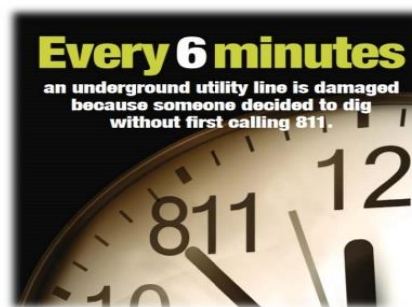
9-1-1 Is an emergency service number in the United State and Canada. However, if you are travelling in other parts of the world, access to emergency services might be different. For example, 999 is used in the United Kingdom.

Sewer Systems and Underground Lines

Did you know sewer utilities in Alaska and across the nation spend thousands of dollars cleaning up ‘fatbergs’ annually? Fatbergs are a monster build-up of fat, food scraps, and sanitary items like wet-wipes in local sewage pipes. Yes - those flushable wipes *aren’t* flushable! In Anchorage, there is a municipal code that forbids flushing anything than can clog a public sewer line. Violators could face a fine from \$75 to \$1,000. In addition, sewer utilities may charge you for cleanup costs.

Federal regulators require homeowners, excavators, and contractors to prevent excavation damage to underground lines.

If you caused excavation damage to a natural gas or hazardous liquid pipelines, you may be subject to federal penalties of up to \$200,000 for each day the violation continues with a maximum penalty of \$2 million in a related series of violations.



**Know what's below.
Call before you dig.**

Behind the Scenes

Did you know that the RCA oversees approximately 700 public utilities and pipeline carriers in Alaska?

Here's a peek behind the scenes of some the RCA's daily operations.

TARIFF REVIEW

Tariffs are the written terms, conditions, rules, and rates of a public utility or pipeline carrier.

For most utilities, the tariff review process takes 45 days. However, certain competitive utility providers are allowed to file revisions that go into effect automatically after a 30 days' public notice.



The RCA's Tariff Analysts maintain about 120 utility and pipeline tariffs

Meet Brittany



Brittany Loper Consumer Protection & Information Officer

Brittany Loper joined the RCA in July of this year. Brittany graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and has seven years of state service between the Department of Labor & Workforce Development, Office of Children's Services, and the Alaska Court System.

The RCA's consumer protection and information officers handle informal complaints filed against providers of electric, natural gas, telephone, water, sewer, and refuse service. A recent review of consumer protection dockets in the last 10 years show that consumer protection's investigation and action on the complaints resulted in over \$1.1 million customer savings and refunds.

While most complaints are resolved informally, some complaints are resolved by the RCA through a formal investigation. In situations like this, consumer protection staff makes a determination on the informal complaint and provides findings and recommendations to the commissioners.

A party who is not satisfied with the resolution of the informal complaint may file a request for action under an alternative dispute resolution or under a formal complaint process before the RCA.

RECORDS & FILING STAFF



R&F SECTION

Records & Filing staff manages all of the RCA's public records, orders, and information requests from staff, the public, attorneys, utilities, and pipeline carriers. Staff processes hundreds of filings and documents daily, maintains current and archive records, and posts public documents to the RCA's website.



Kristin Noelle Schubert
Commission Section Manager



Cameron Rollins, Engineering Review

Cameron joined the RCA as a Utility Engineering Analyst after earning a B.S. in Mathematics and a B.S. in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Nevada Las Vegas.

The Engineering staff reviews applications for Certificate of Public Convenience & Necessity, service areas, plans for plant expansion, plant-in-service schedule, and depreciation schedules. Staff also develops and recommends policies to the RCA concerning certificated public utilities and pipeline carriers.



Nathan Williams

Nathan joined in 2015 and is one of the Law Office Assistants responsible for producing and distributing a broad range of critical and sensitive information including public notices, letter orders, memoranda, certificates, regulations, data, and reports.

Outreach



Steve Jones and Brittany Loper at the
Alaska State Fair Governor's Booth
August 30, 2017

Kristin has been with RCA since 2012. While working as a Law Office Assistant, she attended the University of Alaska Anchorage to complete a Master's Degree in Public Administration with an emphasis in Criminal Justice. As the new Commission Section Manager, Kristin plays an important role in acting as a deputy to the RCA Chairman and Commissioners and in overseeing daily operations of the RCA in coordination with the Advisory Section Manager and Chief Administrative Law Judge.

Lifeline & Link Up Awareness Week September 11-17, 2017

The RCA joins the Federal Communications Commission, National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners, and the National Association of State Consumer Advocates in raising awareness about Lifeline & Link Up telephone discount programs. The Lifeline and Link Up programs provide financial assistance to low-income consumers in connecting a residential phone line, cellular, or a broadband internet service. Lifeline provides discounts on monthly bills and Link Up provides a discount on the cost of initiating service from the telecommunications service provider. In general, consumers at or below 135% of the federal poverty guidelines or who participate in one or more of a number of other assistance programs are eligible for Lifeline and Link Up.

For more information, contact your local carrier or visit www.lifelinesupport.org.

To subscribe to the RCA Consumer e-News, email Grace Salazar, Chief Consumer Protection & Information Officer, at cp.mail@alaska.gov.