

**The California
Public Utilities Commission
Consumer Guide**



California Public Utilities Commission

505 Van Ness Avenue

San Francisco, CA 94102

www.cpuc.ca.gov

www.calphoneinfo.com

Consumer Questions:

800-649-7570

[Complaint Form](#) on the CPUC websites

General Information:

San Francisco 415-703-2782

Los Angeles 213-576-7000

This document was created by the CPUC Consumer Service and Information Division. For copies of it or any consumer publication, contact the Public Advisor's Office toll free 866-849-8390.

Revised August 2009

Table of Contents

Meet the Commission	1
CPUC Services for Consumers.....	2
Need help with a utility problem?	2
Would you like to comment at a hearing?	3
Need assistance in a language other than English?	4
Want us to speak at a community event?	4
Want to hire a moving company?	5
Want to hire a limousine or shuttle?	5
Need information on rail or utility safety?	6
Consumer and Community Programs.....	7
Discounts for Low-income Consumers and Families	7
Energy Efficiency Programs	7
Medical Baseline Allowance.....	8
Deaf and Disabled Telecommunications Services	8
Services for Communities	9
Handy References	10
Publications.....	10
The CPUC Website.....	10
Access CPUC	10
Consumer Assistance Numbers.....	11

Meet the Commission

The Commission consists of five commissioners appointed by the Governor, and approved by the State Senate, for terms of six years. The Governor appoints one of the commissioners as president. The five commissioners as a whole make all decisions on policies and procedures. Commission staff includes administrative law judges, attorneys, technical, safety and consumer service experts, and investigators.

The Commission regulates the rates and/or services of telecommunications, electric, gas, and water utilities and for-hire buses, limousines, airport shuttles, household goods movers, and marine vessels.

The Commission oversees safety standards for power and communications lines, energy and water facilities, railroad systems, and mobile home park propane service.

In some cases, the CPUC prepares an environmental impact report before approving construction of facilities such as transmission lines.

CPUC Services for Consumers

Need help with a utility problem?

The Consumer Affairs Branch can assist you with your telecommunications, energy, and water services complaints.

You have a right to receive safe and reliable utility service, and help with questions or disputes. If you have a complaint about your CPUC-regulated phone, electric, natural gas, or water bill or service:

- Call your utility at the number printed on your bill and discuss the problem with a utility representative.
- If talking to your utility does not resolve the problem, you may ask the CPUC's Consumer Affairs staff to investigate the issue by filing an informal complaint.

If you file a complaint, we will need to know:

- Your name
- A daytime phone number where you can be reached
- Your address and, if different, the service address
- The phone number or account number of the service
- The name of the utility
- A description of the problem

To reach Consumer Affairs:

Phone: 800-649-7570 (assistance in any language)
TTY: 415-703-2032 (English or Spanish)

Electronic: Use the complaint form on the CPUC website
www.cpuc.ca.gov

Write: CPUC Consumer Affairs
505 Van Ness Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94102

Fax: 415-703-1158

Would you like to comment at a hearing?

The Public Advisor's Office coordinates and assists at hearings held throughout the state for consumers' input. The Office assists individuals in filing formal complaints with the CPUC and encourages groups and individuals to participate in Commission proceedings. The office advises the Commission about ways to improve public participation where problems may exist.

Special accommodations such as language or hearing interpreters can be arranged for hearings by contacting the Public Advisor's Office.

Various guides to help you with formal proceedings are available from the Public Advisor offices:

San Francisco Office

public.advisor@cpuc.ca.gov

415-703-2074 or 866-849-8390 (toll free)

Los Angeles Office

public.advisor.la@cpuc.ca.gov

213-576-7055 or 866-849-8391 (toll free)

TTY - both offices and available in English or Spanish:

415-703-5282 or 866-836-7825 (toll free)

Need assistance in a language other than English?

The Bilingual Services Office assists the Commission in providing bilingual services to Californians. If you ask to communicate with someone in a language other than English and are denied that request, you may file a complaint with this office.

Call: 415-355-5589 or 866-494-6186 (toll free)

Want us to speak at a community event?

CPUC Outreach Officers lead the CPUC's effort to influence communities, local governments, and businesses to make smart energy, and telecommunication choices. And to ensure that they are aware of the CPUC's efforts to have safe, reliable utility service at reasonable rates, to protect against fraud, and promote the health of California's economy. To reach them, call or write:

- **San Diego/Orange Counties: John Morgan, 949-364-5418**
e-mail: jm1@cpuc.ca.gov
- **Los Angeles: John Roldan, 213-576-7058**
e-mail: jmr@cpuc.ca.gov
- **Southern California: Sandy Windbigler, 909-864-2290**
e-mail: sew@cpuc.ca.gov
- **Northern California: Drew Cheney, 916-956-8103**
e-mail: dwc@cpuc.ca.gov
- **San Francisco: Rosalina White, 415-703-5355**
e-mail: raw@cpuc.ca.gov

Want to hire a moving company?

The Commission regulates household goods movers that operate within California. Before you contract with one of these companies, be certain the company is in good standing.

- Call 800-877-8867 to verify a license or check online at: www.cpuc.ca.gov, under “Transportation.”
- Read the booklet, “Important Information for Persons Moving Household Goods,” provided by the mover.
- Get an estimate in writing.

Want to hire a limousine or shuttle?

The Commission regulates the services of for-hire limousine and shuttle companies such as those you would hire to get to the airport or for a special event. Before you contract with one of these companies, be certain the company is in good standing.

- Call 800-877-8867 to verify a license or check online at: www.cpuc.ca.gov, under “Transportation.”

If you have a problem you cannot resolve with the mover, limousine or shuttle company, you can file a complaint with the CPUC. Complaints should be submitted in writing or you may e-mail them to ciu_intake@cpuc.ca.gov. Use the form on our website at www.cpuc.ca.gov, under “File a Complaint.” If you do not have access to the internet, call us for a form at the following numbers:

800-FON 4 PUC – for movers

800-894-9444 – for limousines and shuttles

Need information on rail or utility safety?

Rail Safety

The Commission staff inspects rail (freight and passenger trains) and rail transit (subways and others powered by a third rail, overhead electrical wires, or cables), tracks and crossings. If you have safety questions, call the office nearest you.

	Rail	Rail Transit	Rail Crossings
San Francisco	415-314-5836	415-703-2347	415-703-2447
Sacramento	916-327-3239	916-327-1416	916-324-8325
Los Angeles	213-308-7698	213-576-5778	213-576-7097

Utility Safety

If you see wires down or smell gas, call 911 immediately and then your local utility. You can also call the CPUC about safety of electric or telecommunications lines, natural gas pipelines, or propane gas service in mobile home parks at:

800-755-1447

Consumer and Community Programs

The Commission has many consumer and community programs for customers of the Commission-regulated utilities. They are summarized here. More information is available from your utility or our websites (www.cpuc.ca.gov, or www.calphoneinfo.com) or by contacting our consumer assistance departments. **Call your utility if you believe you qualify.**

Discounts for Low-income Consumers and Families

Consumers that meet certain income limits can receive discounts on their local phone service, natural gas, electric and, some water service. The income limits may change every year, making it possible that if you did not qualify last year, you may this year. Call your utility or look on our website for the income limits.

- **Local phone service** – The program is called California LifeLine. Sign up and receive discounts on installation charges when you start-up service and on your service charge every month.
- **Electric and natural gas service** – The program is called California Alternative Rates for Energy (CARE). Sign up and receive a 20% discount on your electric and natural gas service.
- **Family electric discount** – The Family Electric Rate Assistance (FERA) program provides discounts to households of three or more people whose combined income is just above the CARE income limits.
- **Water service** – Some water companies have discounts for low-income customers and others are adding this service. Contact your water utility for more information.

Energy Efficiency Programs

- **Rebates** - Energy utilities offer rebates to customers who purchase energy efficient appliances. In addition to the one-time rebate, customers' bills are less due to using the energy efficient appliances. Before you purchase new appliances, call your utility or check out its website to learn what rebates are available.
- **Free devices** - Energy utilities offer free energy efficient devices and appliances to customers whose household income meets the CARE limits. Call your utility to sign up.
- **Solar** – Incentives are available to consumers who install photo-voltaic systems for electricity. See the CPUC website for more information.

Medical Baseline Allowance

Customers who rely on life support equipment or those who have life threatening illnesses or compromised immune systems can receive more of their electricity and natural gas usage billed at the lowest rate.

Deaf and Disabled Telecommunications Services

Consumers with hearing, vision, mobility, speech and cognitive disabilities may receive specialized telecommunications equipment for free. Also consumers using TTYs may converse with people who have standard phones by using the free California Relay Service.

Internet: www.ddtp.org

Call: 877-546-7414 (Voice)

800-867-4323 (TTY)

Fax: 510-302-1131

Services for Communities

- **Schools, libraries and others** – receive discounts through the California Teleconnect Fund, on high-speed telecommunications lines to use for computer access. Get details from your local utility or the CPUC website under “Communications.”
- **Funding to bring telecommunications services to rural areas where none exist** – the Rural Telecommunications Infrastructure Grant Program provides grants for construction of telecommunications infrastructure in low-income, rural communities that are currently without telephone service. More information about how to apply is available on the CPUC website under “Communications.”
- **Rail safety in your community** – unfortunately, people are killed or severely injured because they fail to stop for, or stay out of the way of trains and rail transit. Education is one way to increase awareness in your community. Operation Lifesaver, in which the CPUC participates, is a national rail safety organization, that will provide educational materials and speakers for your school or community, contact our Outreach Officers or visit the Operation Lifesaver website at: www.oli.org.

Handy References

Publications

Publications that explain CPUC activities and programs are available without charge on the CPUC website or by contacting the CPUC Public Advisor's Office at:

415-703-2074 or 866-849-8390 (toll free)

The CPUC Website

The CPUC website – www.cpuc.ca.gov - contains a wide range of resources, including:

- Daily Calendar, Business Meetings and docket information,
- Legal documents, reports and Division activities and
- Consumer Information and a News Room.

The CPUC also maintains a website that provides consumers information about telecommunications issues and service at www.calphoneinfo.com.

Access CPUC

The CPUC has produced a DVD about:

- Filing a complaint,
- Filing an expedited formal complaint
- Using Alternative Dispute Resolution
- Protesting an application

It is free and viewing options include subtitles in English, Spanish and Chinese. You can also view the DVD online at:

<http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/PUC/news>.

Consumer Assistance Numbers

Utility Questions/Complaints:

800-649-7570, online Complaint form: www.cpuc.ca.gov

Household Movers/Limousine/Shuttles, Verify License:

800-877-8867 or look them up on the CPUC website.

Household Goods Movers Complaints:

800-FON 4 PUC (800-366-4782), e-mail or write and use the form on the CPUC website.

Limousine or Shuttle Complaints:

800-894-9444, e-mail or write and use the form on the CPUC website.

Public Advisor's Office:

San Francisco	415-703-2074
	866-849-8390 (toll free)
Los Angeles	213-576-7055
	866-849-8391 (toll free)

Outreach Officers:

Los Angeles	213-576-7058
San Diego/Orange Counties	949-364-5418
Southern California	909-864-2290
Northern California	916-956-8103
San Francisco	415-703-5355

Bilingual Services 866-494-6186 (toll free)
(if denied assistance in a language other than English)

General Information:

San Francisco	415-703-2782
Los Angeles	213-576-7000

About the CPUC

California has a long tradition of forging innovation in regulation to protect its residents and businesses. In 1853, before a mile of railroad track had been laid in the state, a law was passed making it illegal to charge more than 20 cents a mile for transporting passengers. In 1873, the Legislature created the State Board of Transportation Commissioners, giving it jurisdiction over railroads. In 1911, voters passed a constitutional amendment setting up the Railroad Commission.

The Public Utilities Act in 1912 broadened the Railroad Commission's duties and powers to include utilities and in 1946, the name was changed to the California Public Utilities Commission.

Its purpose continues today: to regulate the rates and services of privately owned utilities and some

transportation companies in the state and to oversee the safety of utility facilities and rail systems.