

Consumer Guide

to the

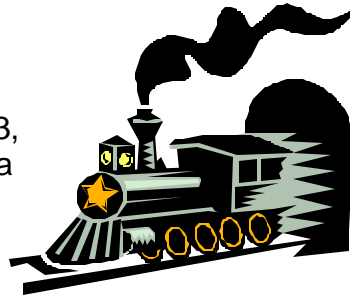
California Public Utilities Commission



The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) is the key source for help and information for customers of investor-owned utilities and some transportation companies in our state. If you use utilities in your home or business, a shuttle service to get to and from the airport, a moving company to move your personal goods into a home, or wonder about the safety of railroads in your community, the CPUC is here for you.

About the CPUC

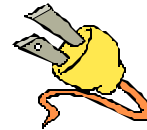
California has a long tradition of forging innovation in regulation to protect its residents and businesses. In 1853, before a mile of railroad track had been laid in the state, a law was passed making it illegal to charge more than 20 cents a mile for transporting passengers. In 1873, the Legislature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



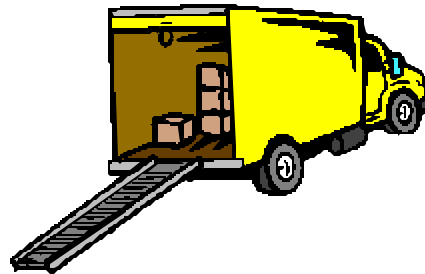
In 1911, voters passed a constitutional amendment setting up the Railroad Commission, making the CPUC one of the few utility regulatory commissions that is created by its State Constitution rather than by legislative statute.



The Public Utilities Act in 1912 broadened the Railroad Commission's duties and powers to include utilities. In 1946, the name was changed to the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC). Its purpose continues today: to regulate privately owned utilities and some transportation companies in the state and oversee safety of utility and rail systems.



This booklet provides a brief description of the Commission, and the consumer services it provides.



The Commission Is Many People

The Commission, or CPUC, consists of five commissioners appointed by the Governor, and approved by the State Senate, for terms of six years. Commissioners' terms are staggered to assure that experienced commissioners are always present on the panel. The Governor designates a president from among the five commissioners who directs staff, chairs the decision-making meetings and other formal sessions and assigns cases among the members. The five commissioners as a whole make all final decisions on policies and procedures.

The staff of more than 900 people includes administrative law judges, engineers, attorneys, support personnel, analysts, economists, accountants, rail and safety experts, consumer service representatives and investigators.

By law, the Commission headquarters is in San Francisco. It also has offices in Los Angeles, Sacramento, and San Diego. Formal documents can be filed at the CPUC offices in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego.

What the CPUC Does

The Commission regulates the rates and services of about 3,300 transportation companies and 1,260 privately-owned telecommunications, energy, and water utilities¹. The utilities regulated by the Commission include natural gas, electric, water, steam, sewer, pipeline, and telephone companies. Transportation utilities regulated by the CPUC include railroads, buses, limousines, airport shuttles, household goods moving companies, and marine vessels.

The Commission also oversees safety standards and procedures for power and communications lines, gas and water facilities, railroad systems, and propane service in mobile home parks. Its inspectors and engineers conduct on-site inspections as part of their regular duties.

In some cases, state law requires the CPUC to prepare an environmental impact report before approving construction of certain facilities such as transmission lines or pipelines.

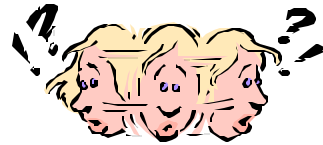
In reviewing a utility's request to increase rates, the Commission must consider and balance the customers' wish for low rates, their need for reliable and safe service and the utilities' rights to collect reasonable costs and a fair profit on investment. In carrying out this responsibility, the Commission encourages participation of all parties and customers affected by its actions.

¹ The CPUC does not regulate municipal energy and water utilities.

CPUC Services for the Consumer

Consumer Affairs Branch

Here to work with you on complaints regarding your Telecommunications, Energy, and Water services



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

- First, 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 informally investigate the issue by filing an informal complaint with the CPUC.
 - If you file a complaint with the CPUC, staff will need to know your name, a phone number where you can be reached during the day, address, address of the service if different, phone number or account number the service is billed under, name of the utility, and a description of the problem.

If our Consumer Affairs staff is not able to resolve the problem, you may file a formal complaint; the Public Advisor will assist you with filing a formal complaint.

To reach Consumer Affairs:

Phone: 800-649-7570; TTY: 415-703-2032

E-mail: consumer-affairs@cpuc.ca.gov

Use a form from the CPUC website: www.cpuc.ca.gov.

Write or Visit:

San Francisco Office

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

Visit the Los Angeles Office

320 W. 4th St., Suite 500
Los Angeles, CA 90013

Public Advisor's Office

The Public Advisor's Office coordinates and assists the public at hearings throughout the state for consumers' input on important issues. The Office assists individuals in filing formal complaints and encourages and assists groups and individuals to participate in Commission proceedings. The Office advises the commissioners and staff about facilitating public participation where barriers may exist.



Specialized accommodations, such as language or hearing interpreters, can be arranged for hearings by calling the Public Advisor's San Francisco Office.

A booklet, which explains how consumers can participate effectively in the CPUC's formal proceedings, sample filings, and a bibliography of intervenor compensation, is available from the Public Advisor offices:

San Francisco Office - 415-703-2074
or (toll free) 866-849-8390
public.advisor@cpuc.ca.gov

Los Angeles Office - 213-576-7055
or (toll free) 866-849-8391
public.advisor.la@cpuc.ca.gov

TTY for both offices: - 415-703-5282
or (toll free) 866-836-7825

Outreach

The CPUC Outreach Officers interact with communities and their elected officials providing information on current Commission proceedings and consumer education. The Outreach Officers are also available to speak at community meetings. To reach them, call or write:

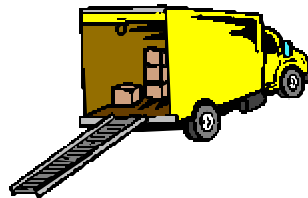
Donna Silvestre - 213-576-7058
320 West 4th Street, Suite 500
Los Angeles, CA 90013

John Morgan - 619-525-4309
1350 Front Street, Room 4000,
San Diego, CA 92101

Household Goods Movers

The Commission regulates household goods movers that move personal goods from and to points within California.

- Before you contract with a mover, call the CPUC to be certain the company is in good standing.
- Get and read the booklet, "Important Information for Persons Moving Household Goods," from the mover.
- Be sure you get an estimate in writing.
- If you have a problem that you cannot resolve with the company, call the CPUC:
800-877-8867 – verify standing
800-FON 4 CPUC – file a complaint



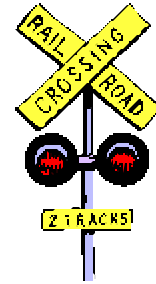
Limousines/Shuttles

The Commission regulates the services of for-hire limousine and shuttle companies such as those you hire to get to and from the airport or to go to a special event.

- Before you contract with a limousine or shuttle, call the CPUC to be certain that the company is in good standing.
- If you have a problem that you cannot resolve, call the CPUC:
800-877-8867 – verify standing
800-894-9444 – file a complaint

Rail Safety

The Commission staff inspects rail and rail transit operations, tracks and crossings. If you have safety related questions, call the office nearest you. Rail transit includes trains or trolleys powered by a cable, a third rail, or overhead electrical lines, such as the Blue Line in Los Angeles and BART in San Francisco.



	Railroad	Rail Transit	Rail Crossings
San Francisco	415-703-1306	415-703-2723	415-703-1559
Sacramento	916-327-3239	916-327-1416	916-324-7143
Los Angeles	213-576-7069	213-576-7086	213-576-7081

Utility Safety

If you see wires down or smell gas, call 911 and your local utility immediately. 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.

How the Commission Grants Authority

Certificates of Public Convenience and Necessity

Before a public utility or a transportation company begins operations or makes significant additions to its plant, it is generally required to obtain a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (CPCN). This procedure helps ensure that the company, or plant addition, serves the public's welfare, is financially sound, and would not interfere with a nearby or competing public utility's operation.

Transfer of Property or Stock

A public utility must receive CPUC approval before it issues stock, bonds, or other securities; sells, transfers, leases, or encumbers utility property; seeks to merge with another utility company, or assumes a liability when acquiring control of a public utility.

Any party seeking to obtain control of a utility through purchase of its stock must first obtain authorization from the Commission.

How the Commission Adopts Policies and Rules

The utility industries are continually changing, and as new technologies are developed, new and improved services are offered. These changes often affect broad sectors of California's population as well as business and industry. Social and economic issues arise that only the Commission has the authority to address. Generally, the Commission uses four types of formal proceedings to review issues:

- **Applications** – when a utility or transportation company requests Commission authority to do something, such as increase rates, it submits an Application.
- **Formal Complaints** – when a consumer advocacy group or individual alleges that a utility company has done something inappropriate and wants the Commission to correct the problem, the group should file a Formal Complaint. A consumer, unable to resolve a utility dispute through the Commission's Consumer Affairs Branch, may also file a Formal Complaint.

- **Order Instituting Investigation (OII)** - the Commission uses this proceeding when it initiates an investigation. For example, it is used when the Commission investigates a moving company's practices.
- **Order Instituting Rulemaking (OIR)** - this proceeding is used to create or revise rules or guidelines that affect a utility or a broad sector of an industry. For example, the Commission is using this proceeding to look at ways to improve energy efficiency.
- **Petition for Rulemaking** – Anyone can petition the Commission to adopt, amend or repeal a regulation. The regulation proposed must apply to an entire class of entities or activities over which the Commission has jurisdiction and must apply to future conduct.

The Process

Formal proceedings may involve hearings but sometimes an issue can be decided based on documents the parties submit, negating the need for a hearing. The CPUC requires utilities or transportation companies to notify their customers when the requests may interest or impact them. The CPUC will also schedule meetings in the community affected to allow for public comment. Utility and CPUC staff usually attend to explain the case, but the focus is on input from the community.



In all formal proceedings, at least one Commissioner and an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) are assigned to guide the case through the CPUC process. Generally, an ALJ conducts the hearings, meets with the assigned Commissioner to discuss developments and issues, and, in consultation with the assigned Commissioner, prepares a proposed decision. The commissioners may prepare alternate proposals, and the full five-member Commission will decide which proposal to authorize during their business meeting.

The Commission's business meetings are held usually twice a month and are open to the public. The agenda and related documents are posted on the website. Those who cannot attend the meeting may listen to it via a webcast. There is a period for public comment at the beginning of each meeting. If a majority of the Commission votes for a proposed decision, it becomes law. In certain complaint cases, the proposed decision may become final without a vote of the Commission, if no party or commissioner requests review of the decision within 30 days after it is issued.

Any decision or order of the Commission is subject to both administrative and judicial review upon a party's written request for a rehearing based on legal error. If the Commission denies rehearing, the requesting party may appeal to the California Supreme Court. Certain decisions in complaint cases may be appealed to the Court of Appeals.

The Commission can also modify a decision in response to a petition to modify (a pleading citing “changed circumstances” rather than legal error).

Publications

Various publications that describe and explain the activities and programs of the CPUC are available without charge on the CPUC website and by contacting the CPUC Communications Office at 415-703-2669.

The CPUC Website

www.cpuc.ca.gov

The CPUC website contains a wide range of resources: a Consumer Help Desk, the Commission’s Daily Calendar, Business Meeting agendas, division activities, legal documents, a News Room, and links to numerous other websites.



California Public Utilities Commission
505 Van Ness Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94102

Consumer Affairs – 800-649-7570
General Information
San Francisco – 415-703-2782
Los Angeles – 213-576-7000

