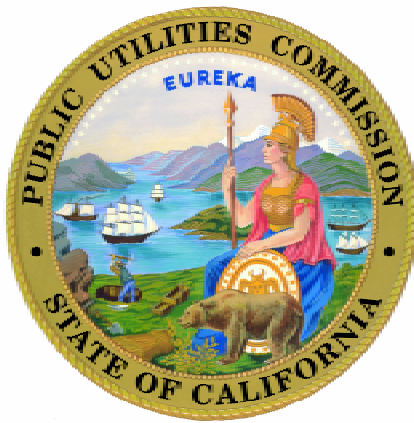


Consumer Guide

to the

California

Public Utilities Commission



California Public Utilities Commission
505 Van Ness Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94102
www.cpuc.ca.gov

Consumer Questions:

800-649-7570

[Complaint Form](#) on the CPUC website, see Quick Hits

General Information:

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

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

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

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The Commission Is Many People



The Commission 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 members are always present on the panel. The Governor appoints one of the commissioners as president who chairs the decision-making meetings and other formal sessions, assigns cases among the members, and directs staff. The five commissioners as a whole make all final decisions on policies and procedures.

The staff includes administrative law judges, attorneys, technical and safety experts, consumer service representatives, and investigators.

By law, the Commission headquarters is in San Francisco. It also has offices in Los Angeles, and San Diego where formal documents can be filed.

What the CPUC Does

The Commission regulates the rates and services of about 1,260 telecommunications, electric, gas, and water utilities and about 3,300 transportation companies including railroads, buses, limousines, airport shuttles, household goods moving companies, and marine vessels.

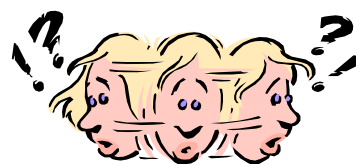
The Commission oversees safety standards for power and communications lines, energy and water facilities, railroad systems, and mobile home park propane service.

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

CPUC Services for Consumers

Consumer Affairs
Public Advisor's Office
Outreach
Bilingual Services
Movers/Limousine/Shuttle Company Complaints
Rail and Utility Safety

How Do I File a Complaint?



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

Consumers have a right to receive safe and reliable utility service, and assistance with questions or disputes.

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 investigate the issue by filing an informal complaint.

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

- ✓ Your name
- ✓ A phone number where you can be reached during the day
- ✓ Your address and, if different, the service address
- ✓ The phone number or account number the service is billed under
- ✓ 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
(see "Quick Hits" on the right of the page) www.cpuc.ca.gov

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

If our Consumer Affairs staff does not resolve the problem, you may file a formal complaint. The Public Advisor's Office will assist you with filing a formal complaint.

What if I Want to Comment at a Hearing?

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

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

A guide that explains how consumers can participate effectively in formal proceedings, sample filings, an intervenor compensation program guide, and a bibliography of intervenor compensation decisions, are available from the Public Advisor offices:

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



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

TTY - both offices and available in English or Spanish:
415-703-5282
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
866-494-6186 (toll free)

Want Us to Participate in a Community Event?

The CPUC Outreach Officers speak at and participate in community meetings, providing information on Commission proceedings and consumer education. 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
- **Judy Cooper** **415-703-2074**
505 Van Ness Avenue, Room. 2103
San Francisco, CA 94102

Want to Hire a Mover?



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

- Before you contract with a mover, call the CPUC to be certain the company is in good standing.
- Read the booklet, "Important Information for Persons Moving Household Goods," provided by the mover.
- Get an estimate in writing.
- If you have a problem with the move that you cannot resolve with the company, call the CPUC:

800-877-8867 – to verify a license

800-FON 4 PUC – to file a complaint

Want to Hire a Limousine or Shuttle?



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 the company is in good standing.
- If you have a problem with the company that you cannot resolve with it, call the CPUC.

800-877-8867 – to verify a license

800-894-9444 – to file a complaint

Need information on Rail or Utility Safety?

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	Rail Transit	Rail Crossings
San Francisco	415-703-1306	415-703-3206	415-703-2723
Sacramento	916-327-3239	916-327-1416	916-324-7143
Los Angeles	213-576-7094	213-576-7086	213-576-7082

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

Consumer and Community Programs

The Commission has instituted many consumer and community programs for customers of the Commission-regulated utilities. They are summarized below. More information is available from your utility or our website (www.cpuc.ca.gov, under “Consumer Information Center”) or by contacting our consumer assistance departments. **Call your utility if you believe you qualify.**



Discount Programs for Low-income Consumers

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, and it is 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 Universal Lifeline Telephone Service, or ULTS. Sign up and receive discounts on installation charges when you start-up service and your monthly service charge.
- **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. Customers enrolled in the program are also exempt from the rate increases authorized in 2001 for Pacific Gas and Electric, Southern California Edison and San Diego Gas and Electric.
- **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** – Currently discount programs for low-income customers are available for California American Water Company customers in its Monterey district and Southern California Water Company customers in its Regions II and III.

Energy Efficiency Programs

- **Rebates** - Energy utilities offer rebates to customers who purchase energy efficient appliances. In addition to the one-time rebate, customers enjoy ongoing savings from using 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 and seniors who are 60 years or older and disabled customers have slightly higher income limits. Call your utility to sign up.

Medical Baseline Allowance

Customers who rely on life support equipment or those who have life threatening illnesses or compromised immune systems can receive some extra allowances of electricity and natural gas.

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. More information:

Internet: www.ddtp.org

Call: 800-867-4323 (Voice)

800-867-4323 (TTY)

Fax: 510-302-1131

Services for Communities

- **Schools, libraries and others** – through the California Teleconnect Fund, schools, libraries and others can receive discounts on high-speed telecommunications lines to use for computer access. Get details from your local utility or the CPUC website under “Regulated Areas, Telecommunications.”
- **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 “Regulated Areas, Telecommunications.”
- **Rail safety in your community** – unfortunately, people get killed or seriously 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. The CPUC participates in Operation Lifesaver, a national rail safety organization, to help advance education. If you would like to learn more or if you would like to arrange for a presentation for your school or community, contact our Outreach Officers or visit the Operation Lifesaver website at: www.oli.org

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).

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 company, or assumes a liability when acquiring control of a public utility. Any party seeking to control 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 as new technologies and new services come into play. These changes often affect consumers and the economy, and issues may arise that only the Commission has the authority to address. Generally, the Commission uses five types of formal proceedings to review issues:

- **Application** – a request by a utility or transportation company to do something such as a rate increase.
- **Formal Complaint** – an allegation by a consumer advocacy group that a company has done something and requests the Commission to correct the problem. A consumer may also file a formal complaint if unable to resolve a dispute through the Commission's Consumer Affairs Branch.
- **Order Instituting Investigation (OII)** – a proceeding initiated by the Commission to investigate something, such as a utility's purchasing practices.
- **Order Instituting Rulemaking (OIR)** – a proceeding initiated by the Commission to create or revise rules or guidelines that affect a utility or a broad sector of an industry, such as creating customer service rules for telecommunications utilities.
- **Petition for Rulemaking** – a petition from anyone requesting the Commission adopt, amend or repeal a regulation which applies to an entire class of customers or activities.



The Process

Formal proceedings may involve hearings but sometimes an issue can be decided without hearings through study of the documents the parties submit. 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.

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

The Commission's business meetings are held usually twice a month and are open to the public. There is also a period for public comment at the beginning of each meeting. If you wish to speak at the business meeting, arrive early and sign up with the Public Advisor.

In certain complaint cases, the decision of the presiding officer may become final without a vote of the Commission, if no party or commissioner requests a review of the decision within 30 days after it is issued.

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

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

Publications

Various publications that describe and explain CPUC activities and programs are available without charge on the CPUC website and 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:

- a Consumer Information Center,
- the Commission's Daily Calendar,
- business meeting agendas,
- division activities and reports,
- legal documents,
- a News Room, and
- links to numerous other websites.

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

Household Goods Movers Complaints:

800-FON 4 PUC (800-366-4782)

Limousine or Shuttle Complaints:

800-894-9444

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	619-525-4309
San Francisco	415-703-2074

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.