

REPRESENTATIVE POLICY BOARD
CONSUMER AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

JUNE 16, 2025

MEETING TRANSCRIPTION

Naomi:

Okay. I'll call the meeting to order. The first thing on the agenda is the safety moment. It's time to be firing up the grills, so be sure that you pay careful attention to your grill. Before lighting your grill, do a safety check. Has your grill been recalled? Check that out if you can through safetyproducts.gov.

Visually, inspect your hoses. Check for your propane tank. And is your grill clean from last year or when's the last time you used it? Be sure that you're grilling outside. Never leave your grill unattended and keep children away from the grill.

As we move on, are there any members of the public on? Okay, our next thing is could I get an approval of the minutes from May 19th?

Charles:

I'll move it.

Naomi:

It's moved.

Mark:

Seconded.

Naomi:

It has been moved by Charles and a second Mark. Are you ready for the questions? Hearing none, seeing none, I declare it as a vote, as a motion. Next up we'll get our report from the OCA, Jeff?

Jeff:

Yes, good evening, everybody. On the consumer front, the last few months I reported to you about two specific consumer complaints that had been escalated to us. One from a customer in Derby involving the proposed charge for an extension, main extension cost. The other from a customer in East Haven concerning a valve and water consumption dispute.

We issued our report in both of those cases to the customer and the authority on June 4th. The Derby customer isn't sure that he wants to go forward with any appeal. He's going to think about it and get back to us later this week. He may just decide not to pursue it any further. The East Haven customer asked for a 30-day extension because she's pretty far along with a pregnancy. And she asked us for a 30-day extension to decide whether she wants to appeal our recommendation. And we told her that OCA doesn't have authority or jurisdiction to grant extensions, but I would present it to the Consumer Affairs Committee. We certainly, under the circumstances, don't object to giving her some extra time to appeal the decision if she'd like to.

On the non-consumer front, the OCA will be submitting on Thursday its memo to the RPB concerning the pending application that you have a hearing on June 26th on concerning the authority's application

for some significant electric improvements at the Lake Lard and Lake Saltonstall water treatment plants respectively. And that's it.

Mark:

I have a question about, you and I had talked about and I talked to Naomi about it, about the responsibility of the water company with this new system that we have, should have noticed that that person had gone over on usage of the water considerably and should have been notified that there was a big jump in their usage so that they could have taken care of it beforehand. And I don't know why our system wasn't working that it didn't happen. I'd like to know why.

Jeff:

Thank you for reminding me, Mark. I do think it makes sense for us at an upcoming consumer affairs committee meeting to get the authority to talk to us about how that tool from AMI is being used, what kind of data they're getting. And whether this was something, how is it detected when you have somebody that had a \$37 bill one month and then \$1,200 the next and it's all tied to consumption. What kind of data, who sees it, how frequently do they see it? How's it being used? Is the tool that we got consistent with the tool that we expected to get back when the application was presented? I think it'd be great just to get a little bit of an update on AMI and how some of those tools are being utilized.

Mark:

Well, I think you're right. And something tells me that if we're at fault, Prim has indicated he thought it's a courtesy that we give him this information. I don't believe it's a courtesy. I think it's our job that we have this kind of equipment now that we should have been able to tell this person, "Wow, you have a jump in your water supply from 50 gallons a day to 500 a day," or whatever it is and you should take care of it and want us to send somebody out. And that's what our job as consumer affairs, I think should be our job.

Naomi:

Okay. I have Dana here. Dana, could you shed some light on this place for us?

Dana:

I think spending a little more time talking about it at length, I'll say updating you all, it's been a little while since we've talked about the AMI project, so we can definitely do that. We'll work to schedule that as a special topic maybe.

In this particular instance, this customer was not sent a notification of her leak due to... I don't want to get too technical so I'm going to try to just keep it high level for you. But there were a couple of different issues with her FlexNet. So we also were having intermittent communication. And that warning takes priority over the continuous consumption. That is a configuration setting that is being reviewed with our AMI vendor so that we're looking to re- I'm going to say assess those priorities to make sure that they still make sense for today's business world. So she was not notified. And Mark, I-

Mark:

How much did her consumption go up as... Was she late in her bill? Was she past due in her bill?

Dana:

She had actually been paying, which is why we needed to-

Mark:

Every month or every three months she was paying her bill, whatever it was, \$37?

Dana:

It was probably about four or five weeks. I'm trying to go off memory, sorry, because I don't have her account open in front of me, about four or five weeks where this happened. And so she did get her higher bill. She did pay it. We did give her a partial refund, which is part of what she's not happy with. She wants additional monies back.

Mark:

Well, some of the things she's talking about is that why wasn't she notified?

Dana:

And I am agreeing with her that we did not notify. And it has to do with the configuration within the AMI system that prioritized one type of warning over the consumption warning. So that meant that the letter which is automated did not go out.

Mark:

So it means the setting for the warning was not set for what her condition was.

Dana:

No, her condition met the criteria to be notified about continuous consumption. However, the configuration placed a higher priority on a communication message from the FlexNet, not the usage message from the FlexNet. And that communication message trumped the continuous consumption message so it was never flagged to send. So the message and the information is there in the AMI system. And again, I apologize if I'm getting a little bit too technical, but that is essentially what we found when we investigated this customer. This was not something we were-

Mark:

It wasn't her fault then? It wasn't her fault that we-

Dana:

Usage is definitely her fault. And this is, we can talk maybe as part of the AMI discussion because this was a big topic as I recall when we were implementing AMI and some of these communication components that usage is the customer's responsibility. We work with them. There are waste adjustments and other extenuating circumstances that we work with, but this customer's not disputing that she used the water. And what happens after the meter per rules and regs is the customer's responsibility.

Mark:

I understand that, but it has to go through the meter. You keep saying, "Her valve after the meter." I don't understand. It still has to go through the meter, so I don't understand what's talking about there.

Dana:

It did go through the meter.

Mark:

So what I'm saying is that the woman's bill was \$37 a month and it jumped to \$1,200. And we didn't notify her. And I think that means, because she comes down on our head, that we didn't fulfill what we should have done.

Dana:

I definitely agree it was a customer disservice and that is why we offered adjustments for her and are trying to work with her.

Mark:

Well, don't you think you should just go back to the \$37 bill or wherever her original bill was?

Jeff:

Well, I mean there is some customer responsibility. This is a valve that's inside her home that she activated.

Mark:

I think-

Jeff:

So you know-

Mark:

... it still has to go through our meter.

Jeff:

I know, but to write it off to zero or down to \$37 isn't fair to the other customers.

Mark:

I mean in this case we didn't... Now if we warned her that the system was her... She was using a lot of water, continued to use the water, then it's her fault. But we never warned the person. We spent a lot of money to get that AMI system going. And one of the things that we liked about the system and one of the things we talked about was that this system would tell us when customers have this problem. And we failed the first time out of the shoot.

Dana:

Actually, we've had many, many successes with the notification. And as I said, this was a particular configuration that was an unusual circumstance that we are working to rectify in terms of how those priorities of messages are treated within the notifications that go out. This customer did manage her usage. When she found this valve, she had operated it several times, turned it off, turned it on. She was very aware of what the valve was doing eventually, when she realized what was happening. And they did try to control some of their usage.

So I think right now I would say we'll take the guidance of OCA and consumer affairs in terms of the appropriate treatment here, but what we were working with with this customer is that she owned and managed her usage. We worked with her in terms of trying to... I believe we gave her back half of all of the consumption. And she's really looking for an additional adjustment on that.

Mark:

Well, I think we should look into giving her more and that's my opinion. That's just my opinion. Whether you go down to zero, that's another thing. But that's my opinion.

I think Jeff has a good point. Prem's away, so I think when he gets back we should have a meeting of how that ACI system works for something like that.

Suzanne:

He might.

Mark:

What the parameters are and such.

Jim:

You said there was a communication that trumped the notification.

Suzanne:

Patient have issues.

Charles:

Can you give us an example of what that communication was that trumped this notification?

Dana:

Yes. Give me just one minute. I just want to make sure that I quote it properly. Just let me through up where that was. [inaudible 00:14:03].

Naomi:

Suzanne, do you have a question?

Suzanne:

I was going to suggest something, but I think it's fine. I think she's handling it just fine. Thanks.

Naomi:

Okay.

Stephen:

All right. Dana, this is Steve. When you report back to us, can you let us know what the threshold is, if there is one for when a notification would be given?

Dana:

Yes. I can actually tell you now. We can make that part of the formal communication as well, but it's continuous consumption, it's triggered when a customer's meter interval consumption hourly usage does not go to zero for 72 straight hours.

Stephen:

Wow, that's a long time though.

Dana:

It is, but it could also be very relevant if you're filling your pool or your kids are home from college for that weekend. It was done based on best practice working with our AMI vendor and does align with most of our customer usage. There are times that it doesn't go to zero.

Stephen:

No, Yes, I understand that. But if there is a problem and they have it for 72 hours, that could be a huge amount for... If you notify somebody and they're filling their pool, it's no big deal that you notified them. But if you notify a customer, they're notified. Okay. We can talk about that a little more another time.

Dana:

There's a lot more. Yes, there are other notifications about volume if it exceeds the maximum amount of the meter, again indicating a burst or a other type of issue, that would be a different notification than just continuous consumption. Continuous consumption could just be one CCF hourly for... One CF actually, I'm so sorry, it's not a CCF. It's one CF.

Mark:

It could be a toilet leak.

Dana:

Yes, exactly. Exactly.

Charles:

You didn't mean that it goes to zero for 72 hours, you meant it goes to zero in that 24.

Dana:

That's right. It does not go to zero over the course of 72 hours.

Charles:

Steve, did you understand that?

Stephen:

So it's not volume, it's time.

Dana:

Correct.

Stephen:

Correct?

Dana:

Right, that continuous consumption does not look at the volume itself only the fact that it has not gone to zero over 72 hours. So even if it's just once it will trigger.

Mark:

Is there ways to adjust it to inform us at different times?

Dana:

I'm sorry, Mark. Adjust it?

Mark:

Is there ways to change that so it informs us differently? Different criteria for that [inaudible 00:17:12]?

Dana:

That's [inaudible 00:17:15] Yes. Yes. Yes, it is.

Mark:

It is, it could be changed there?

Dana:

Yes, it can be changed. We would want to make sure we're aligned with best practice and things that make sense to notify customers reasonably so that they're not getting a letter every day or something of that nature. But we definitely want to manage that.

Mark:

I'm sure-

Dana:

There are options there, Mark. Yes.

Mark:

Yes, Yes, that's not what I'm talking about. To bring stuff up like that's not right. I mean we're trying to work out this problem that this person had and she's in a bind. And the AM system didn't work or we didn't take what it should have said. I just think that that's a problem. And I think we should discuss it when, like Jeff said, we should have a meeting and find out what your parameters are for AMI and how we're going to look at this and what's going to be the difference with this. That's my opinion.

Naomi:

Okay. Does anybody else have any other questions about this? So this is something that-

Dana:

If you could give me a minute, I really probably follow up. It's just not coming to me as quickly as I talked about.

Charles:

That would be my struggle with what countering to what Mark's saying. I mean have the notification trumped by something that I don't know what it is at this point in time. That would make a difference to me because the parameters, I think it's logical that you watch something for 72 hours to see what the usage is. So you weren't notifying people every day about everything.

Dana:

To Mark, there are-

Charles:

That's sorted out.

Dana:

Yes.

Charles:

Okay.

Naomi:

Okay, so we'll revisit this once you get more information about the AI system, things like that. Okay. Also, what's next on the agenda is getting an approval for Jeff's invoice for the month of May for \$2,832.

Stephen:

I'll move it.

Naomi:

Can I get a second?

Mark:

Second.

Naomi:

Okay. Is Steve?

Dana:

Steve, yes.

Naomi:

It has been moved by Steve and second by Mark. You ready for the question. All those that in favor?

Committee members:

Aye.

Naomi:

All those that are opposed have the same right? Seeing none, is the vote on before. We also, the next item on the agenda is for the volunteers for the authority meetings for the month of June, it would be Charles. For the month of July it would be Steve for the month of August it'll be Mark and I am on September, Naomi. Okay. Next item on the agenda is notification of the committee chair election, which will be held in July. If anybody's interested, we let you know, Jennifer?

Dana:

You can look.

Naomi:

Okay. Any new business?

Mark:

I do. I have another question if that's okay. My question is how we're doing? Last time we talked our backlog of phone calls or our daily phone calls were 500 calls averaging. Now before we put it in the system, we're averaging 350. Has that gone down? Do we have a handle on that yet?

Dana:

Yes, things are improving. The numbers you're using in terms of a backlog of calls I think might be referring to when we were doing our automated callback virtual hold. We are not actually using that tool right now to be able to better manage the incoming volume. And it has gotten a lot better. Over the last few weeks we are still averaging a little higher than we'd like for our abandoned rate, but we are at about 7% averaging that. And we don't have that backlog of calls because we're taking them as they come.

Mark:

So 500 calls a day has gone down to what?

Naomi:

My question too.

Dana:

I'm sorry.

Naomi:

With the percentage what we just said that-

Mark:

Now I'm asking how many...

Naomi:

[inaudible 00:21:43].

Mark:

My question-

Dana:

Right now there are zero backlog calls because we answer the calls that come into the queue.

Mark:

My question-

Dana:

And about 7% of those customers who are calling us are hanging up before we can get to them. I have an average speed of answer sitting around two minutes right now. And we're averaging about 1,800 calls a day, which is still significantly more than what we used to get.

Mark:

1,800 calls a day? I thought it was like 500 you said the last time. How come it's over?

Dana:

No. I believe that's the backlog that we had mentioned there was a day that we had turned on the automated callback tool. And we ended the day with 500 calls waiting for callback. That's not a normal backlog. That wasn't happening every day. That was just an example of why we weren't using that feature as we wanted to.

Mark:

Let me ask you a question. How many calls a day did we get before we put this new system in?

Dana:

So we would get about 6,000 calls a month. So 6,000, it's about 300-ish give or take.

Mark:

Calls per day?

Dana:

Yes.

Mark:

That's calls per day. Now you're saying the calls are 1,800 per day?

Dana:

Yes.

Mark:

1,800?

Dana:

Yes.

Mark:

That's a lot more calls.

Dana:

It is a lot-

Stephen:

Dana, what's the primary reason for those calls?

Dana:

Billing questions, portal questions. Today for example, I had 600 calls come in. So it depends on the day. It depends on the day. Please, please-

Mark:

The average is what? Is 1,800 a day or 1,500?

Dana:

No, that includes technology as well. I apologize. Agent answered calls today was 600 calls is what we got. I'm looking at my dashboard now.

Mark:

600 calls came in today? Now before we had the system was 350.

Dana:

Yes.

Mark:

So the system, what is the system doing to improve that, to knock that down?

Dana:

We're-

Mark:

I thought people didn't have to call as much because the system was supposed to take care of that, this new system. We've had it for-

Dana:

There are still.

Mark:

... four months, five months now?

Dana:

Two and a half. Two. Yes, two and a half.

Mark:

Two and a half. That's all? Okay.

Dana:

April 2nd we went live. Yes. So people are using our self-service features in the portal. So they're making payments. They can do some service appointment setting there. Most of these questions are related to either trying to combine accounts into their portals, questions about their bills.

Again, whether it's just regular consumption usage and I would call them normal billing calls. I think that when you change your system, you change your bill. People are a little more attuned and asking questions differently that we might normally experience. And I would expect that this... Or I'm sorry, let me change that. I would expect that we will start to see us returning to normal call volumes as things settle down.

Customers have only gotten two bills out of our new system right now. They're still making payments. They have questions about some of our auto-pay. I had three customers today who did not enter their routing numbers properly. The wallet. So when they're trying to use their auto-payments, they're failing and asking why their payments aren't posted. It's because they use their RWA account number in all three instances as their routing number for their bank instead of their actual routing numbers. So as we make these transitions and people are getting used to things, again, it's an anecdotal example, I'm not saying that's all-

Mark:

How many do the supervisors jumping in to answer these calls now or are they still just giving advice?

Dana:

Our supervisors are available. We primarily are handling escalations, but the team is managing most of the volume.

Mark:

The team is. And how many are on the team?

Dana:

We have 12 full-time call takers, 10 full-time, two part-time. And we have six specialists who also jump on to assist with calls.

Mark:

So how long do you think it's going to be before we get this down, the call volume, before people realize how the system's working?

Dana:

It's a speculation I'm hesitant to make. Some of other utilities who have done system changes of the magnitude we've done, it can take six months to a year to get back to normal. I can get some additional data for you on that in terms of [inaudible 00:26:42] but it's speculation.

Mark:

I just want to know if you got the fair assessment. I just can't believe that we've gone from 350 to 1,800 or 600 or so average phone calls a day.

Dana:

Yes. I apologize.

Mark:

I mean I think that's a lot into the billing department when you have a new system like this. But what do I know? Anyways, good luck to you. Well, you've got a big job in front of you.

Naomi:

Suzanne.

Suzanne:

Yes, I just want to add a couple things for context on this particular system. Just a reminder to everybody on the committee that 100% of the people who were on auto-pay in some regard in system had to re-enter their auto-pay to get their billing back online. And there was a tremendous amount of effort to make that happen. And as long as that's the case, until the billing cycle goes through two to three times and people look at their bill and realize that their auto-pay is not happening anymore and start to pay attention to the messages they're getting, these calls are going to come in.

I think the volume that we've got right now based on a new system two months out is exactly where it should be and probably will be like this through the end of the year. And it'll probably taper off as time goes on. And if you keep in mind that we have 10 people and 600 calls, they're handling 60 calls a day, which is not an overwhelming volume for them to handle on a daily basis.

It's not simple, but it's not impossible for them to deal with that. And a 600 call day is a high day. So she's saying on average 300 and it's 10 people, that's 30 calls a day. So I just wanted to put it in a context for-

Mark:

Well, do you think that the supervisors should jump in and answer calls or you don't think that should happen?

Suzanne:

My guess is that everybody is on alert and doing what they need to do to jump in when necessary. And for a two-minute wait time if I don't know, last time you called an 800 number and got a two-minute wait time is pretty exceptional for us at the end of the day. So the 7% abandonment rate is probably more. I just don't have time at this point to wait two minutes, but two minutes is nothing. So I think given where they are, these are very good stats that we should stay on top of and make sure everybody's hands on and make sure that-

Mark:

You get a water bill?

Suzanne:

I get many water bills. I manage a lot of different households. And so that's why I wanted to comment earlier on the usage issue because I've also gotten messages about usage and had to get up inside all that kind of stuff too. So I think this company does an exceptional job servicing its customers.

Charles:

Do you think that when it all settles down six months or a year from now that we will go back to using the callback feature?

Dana:

I would like us to. I think it's a great service for customers. I do think it's so much-

Charles:

If they call back, it works.

Dana:

Yes. I think as the call volume becomes more manageable for us, again, we're still higher than where-

Charles:

It's not a feature we eliminate.

Dana:

... it becomes more of an inconvenience for the customer I think given our current structure.

Charles:

Yes. Right now, it's just aggravated that much more, right?

Dana:

Yes.

Charles:

Especially at the end of the day when you had 500, that was what sent up all the red flags.

Dana:

That's where we... Exactly. And not where I want to get back to. But it's a great feature and I do anticipate we'll be able to use it even if it's just selectively during the day, there's probably [inaudible 00:30:28]

Stephen:

Hey, Dana. This is Steve. I'm guessing that these calls might be taking a little longer too with the new system. Would that be the case?

Dana:

Yes. And thank you for pointing that out as well. Yes, it is. The team is getting better and our handle times are improving. And we do continue to work with them in terms of how to keep driving our handle times lower. But yes, the customers have questions. The team is a little slower still navigating through the system than the SAP solution they've been using for decades. So that will also help drive better call volume and better results as we improve our average speed of answer because of lower handle times as we drive that down. And thank you.

Stephen:

Thank you. No, I think they're handling a great volume of calls. That's a full day.

Charles:

I think it was the last meeting, it was pointed out that, to Suzanne's point, everybody in auto-pay, which we want to encourage, has to reenter everything. But we are not allowed to reenter. In other words, some places they'll walk you through it, they'll do it for you type thing. And I know that's a big no-no with account numbers and stuff.

Dana:

That did turn into... Yes. Yes. So we want to make sure that we're compliant with personal data compliance so our team can no longer do that. And that is some of our... A good point.

Charles:

Right. And at the same time we want to encourage everybody to auto-pay.

Dana:

Yes, we do.

Charles:

I'm okay with it, but it's something we have to watch.

Naomi:

Anybody else have anything else? And I just have to say something for... Since it's only been two months, I don't know if anybody here has ever been through anything like this, but I have been, because I've been out in the working world for a long time. And I have gone through many changes like this. And believe me, nothing happens overnight.

And I fear given the two months, they're still new at this. And I think it's going to take a while and it may not be a year. We don't know. But I just know, I think we're doing a great job because like I said, given two months, I work right now at the health department. We changed our system. We've been there a year. We're still trying to get used to it, okay, so it doesn't happen overnight.

And like they just said also about the accounts and stuff, we want the auto-pays. We want people to pay like that. And you have to, I mean all for banking purposes. I'm coming from a banking background. We cannot enter numbers. You're not allowed to take customer's information. So this is something that they have to do and you just have to give it time. Okay. Anybody have anything else? Okay. Our next regular meeting is going to be held on Monday, July 22nd at 5:30 PM.

Stephen:

Oh, you have the 21st on the agenda.

Naomi:

Yes, that's what it says.

Dana:

Oh, Yes. Yes.

Naomi:

21st.

Dana:

You said 22nd.

Naomi:

Oh, I'm sorry. 21st. Sorry. Stand corrected. Anybody have anything else? Okay. Can I get a motion for adjournment please?

Charles:

Representative Policy Board
Consumer Affairs Committee
June 16, 2025

So moved.

Naomi:

Can I get a second?

Stephen:

Second.

Naomi:

Thank you. Everybody have a good evening.