

CONSUMER SPOTLIGHT

Public Utility News You Can Use

Issue 30 | April 2018



Executive Director's Message

By Dean Nishina

I mentioned in our last newsletter that the Consumer Advocate's (CA) office will be evaluating how the effects of the tax cuts from the federal government will impact consumers. The Public Utilities Commission (PUC) recently opened a docket to investigate those impacts. You can read more about it on page 2 of this newsletter.

Another rate case before the PUC is highlighted in this issue. West Hawaii Utility Company is seeking rate increases for three of its utilities. The article can be found on page 3 and, as always, you can find all related documents to each filing on PUC's Document Management System online by searching the docket number (noted at the end of an article).

Lastly, three consumer awareness pieces can be found in this edition: phone scams that are targeting electric ratepayers, tips to detect a leak in your home to save on water bills, and the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) application period.

Did You Know?

It takes 3,000 to 6,000 gallons of water to power a 60-watt incandescent bulb for 12 hours per day over the course of a year!



Source: Environmental Protection Agency, WaterSense



www.facebook.com/DCCAHawaii



DCA participated in the National Consumer Protection Week Fair on March 7. The free fair was open to the public and held around the courtyard of the King Kalakaua building, where DCA's office is located.

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The PUC will investigate impacts of the recent tax cuts.

PUC Opens Proceeding to Investigate the Impacts of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017

In December of 2017, the 2017 Tax Act was signed into law. At the start of the new year, it significantly reduces the federal corporate income tax rate. The Consumer Advocate (CA) believes that this change should result in customer savings. The CA filed a letter with the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) urging the commission to take necessary action to preserve Hawaii consumers' interests by "granting deferral accounting authority and requiring affected regulated companies to make the necessary regulatory liability entries (and to maintain the relevant support) to quantify and preserve for regulatory action the 2017 Tax Act impacts."

The PUC found it is reasonable and in the public interest for utilities to immediately begin tracking the impact of the 2017 Tax Act as of January 1, 2018, until the PUC is able to issue final decisions regarding any utility rate adjustments necessary to account for the 2017 Tax Act.

The exhaustive list of 46 utilities named as parties to this docket can be found in Order No. 35241. High profile utility companies include Hawaiian Electric Companies, Kauai Island Utility Cooperative, Hawaiian Telcom, Inc., The Gas Company, LLC, and Young Brothers, Ltd. The PUC may ask for public comment as necessary.

Docket No. 2018-0012

PUC Docket Numbers are included in these articles for further, in depth reading. PUC public filings are accessible online via the PUC's Document Management System (DMS). Visit: <http://dms.puc.hawaii.gov/dms>

Renewed Alert for Recent Phone Scams

A rash of reported calls pretending to be from a utility company have recently occurred again. The Consumer Advocate would like to remind ratepayers that if you receive a call from someone demanding payment by threatening to shut off your utilities, it is most likely an imposter running a utility scam.

It is suggested that you hang up the phone, and contact your utility company using the phone number listed on your utility bill or on their website to confirm the status of your account.

Don't send money or give out personal information in response to an unexpected request.

You can also report a potential scammer has contacted you by filing a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC):

<http://www.ftc.gov/complaint>.



If you feel you've received a phone scam, just hang up!

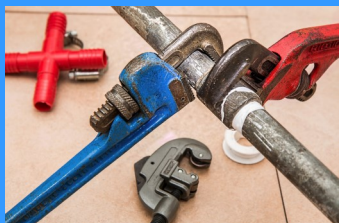
Fix a Leak Week

While the United States Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) tenth annual Fix a Leak Week is March 19 through March 25, remember you can find and fix leaks inside and outside your home all year long. It'll save valuable water and money for yourself.

Nationwide, household leaks can waste more than 1 trillion gallons of water annually. Hunt down the drips in your home and prevent paying more on your water utility and wastewater utility bills.

Common types of leaks found in the home are worn toilet flappers, dripping faucets, and other leaking valves. These types of leaks are often easy to fix, requiring only a few tools and hardware that can pay for themselves in water savings.

Fixing easily corrected household water leaks can save homeowners about 10 percent on their water and wastewater bills. To check for leaks in your home, determine if you're wasting water then identify the source of the leak.



Source: United States Environmental Protection Agency



West Hawaii Utility Company will need to file separate rate case applications for each of its utility services.

West Hawaii Utility Company Applies for Rate Increase

Waikoloa Resort Utilities, Inc. dba West Hawaii Utility Company (WHUC) submitted an application to the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) for rate increases for its utility company as well as for West Hawaii Water Company (WHWC) and West Hawaii Sewer Company (WHSC) - its water and wastewater services respectively (collectively called "Waikoloa Utilities").

Waikoloa Utilities is requesting a net overall revenue increase of \$2,400,603 for its consolidated operations. This amounts to an approximate increase of 29.2 percent. The proposal is comprised of proposed increases of \$305,026 (7.2 percent) for water service, \$2,046,590 (55.4 percent) for sewer, and \$48,988 (15.9 percent) for irrigation service. It cites that current rates will not produce sufficient revenues to earn a fair rate of return and has plans to make additional capital improvements in the Test Year.

PUC Denies WHUC's Request for Consolidation of Rate Case Applications

The PUC denied Waikoloa Utilities' request to consolidate the rate case applications of WHUC, WHWC, and WHSC into a single proceeding. After consideration, the PUC was unconvinced that the consolidation of the forthcoming general rate case applications of WHUC, WHWC, and WHSC into a single proceeding would be "conducive to the proper dispatch of the commission's business, the ends of justice, or would not unduly delay the proceedings." The Consumer Advocate did not take a position on Waikoloa Utilities' Motion for Consolidation.

Docket No. 2017-0350

LIHEAP Application Period for Energy Credit Opens in June

The application period to receive an energy credit through the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) is from June 1 to June 30, 2018. Eligible applicants will receive a one-time payment that will be deposited directly into their utility account. You can visit <http://humanservices.hawaii.gov/bessd/liheap/> for more information and to download the 2018 application. Eligibility for LIHEAP is determined by community action agencies.

However, LIHEAP also has an energy crisis program that assists with up to \$500 to restore power of a household whose electricity or gas has been shut off within the last 60 days or is about to be terminated. This is also a one-time payment made directly to the utility company. The program runs year-round and there is no need to wait for the application period for assistance.

LIHEAP is a federally funded program by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It provides needy households in need of heating and/or cooling assistance by helping with payments toward their utility (electric or gas) bill.

Upcoming Dates of Interest

- **Mar 26: Prince Kuhio Day** (State holiday, our office will be closed).
- **Mar 30: Good Friday** (State holiday, our office will be closed).
- **April 4: Financial Literacy Fair**, DCA will have a table at this fair held at Tamarind Park from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.



- **Apr 22: Earth Day** Turn off appliances when not using them. You'll save energy and the environment.
- **May 28: Memorial Day** (State holiday, our office will be closed).



Consumer Spotlight

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We also welcome feedback and story ideas. Email us at dca@dcca.hawaii.gov.

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