

CONSUMER SPOTLIGHT

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE & CONSUMER AFFAIRS
DIVISION OF CONSUMER ADVOCACY



Executive Director's Message

By: Dean Nishina

Summer is in full swing! As we navigate this warmer and drier season, our division continues to advocate for consumers of regulated transportation and utility industries. Just a reminder that since we are in hurricane season here in Hawaii, residents are

encouraged to be prepared in case of an emergency. Find hurricane preparedness tips in this issue. In addition, if you're looking to save money, look for Energy Star label information in this issue.

A few of the many dockets that the Consumer Advocate is protecting consumer interests in are in this newsletter, including an emergency investigation into Sandwich Isles Communication, AirVoice seeking to become an eligible telecommunications carrier in Hawaii, the PUC denying Hu Honua's PPA, and the conditional approval of Launiupoko Irrigation's rate increase. In this issue you can find information on LIHEAP & LIHWAP, and as always, you can find up to date utility bill assistance information on our website.

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Got ENERGY STAR?



The next time you decide to upgrade your home or business appliances look for this label.

ENERGY STAR® is the government-backed symbol for energy efficiency, providing simple, credible, and unbiased information that consumers and businesses rely on to make well-informed decisions.

To earn this label, equipment must meet strict energy efficiency criteria set by the US Environmental Protection Agency.



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EMERGENCY INVESTIGATIVE PROCEEDINGS REGARDING SANDWICH ISLES COMMUNICATIONS, INC.

Hurricane Preparedness

The Hawaiian Islands sit in the midst of storm tracks. Hurricane season runs from June 1st through November 30th, though storms are also known to appear outside of this seasonal window.

Don't wait until a storm is about to hit to make your emergency preparations. Prepare ahead of time to prevent unnecessary damage to your property and physical injury to yourself and others.

There are many ways to prepare for natural disasters, ranging from creating an emergency supply kit to safeguarding your valuables. But did you know you should also protect your electronics from a surge?

When power is restored by the power company after any outage, including outages caused by storms or hurricanes, it can cause surges that can travel for miles.

Here are a few extra steps to take to mitigate power surges when preparing for storms or hurricanes:

1. Bigger appliances, like ovens and stoves, should be turned off.
2. Unplug appliances like coffee pots, televisions, microwaves, and entertainment systems.
3. Consider installing a whole home surge protector at your electrical panel and use smaller surge protection devices for expensive electronics, like televisions, computers, and printers.

Following a request from the Consumer Advocate, the Public Utilities Commission recently opened Docket No. 2022-0037 to investigate Sandwich Isle Communication's (SIC) fitness, willingness, and ability to continue providing telecommunications services to its customers on lands administered by the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands (DHHL).

SIC is a rural telephone company restricted to providing services on lands administered by DHHL. SIC established an infrastructure of inter-island undersea fiber cables and middle-mile terrestrial fiber on Hawaiian Home Lands, called the "Paniolo Network," that it used to provide telecommunications services to among other things, Hawaiian Home Lands. SIC's history of service includes Federal penalties and fines, defaults, and bankruptcy proceedings. As a result, the PUC investigation is seeking to determine whether SIC is still able to provide quality services to customers.

The docket will be used to address the uncertainties surrounding SIC's provision of services to its customers on Hawaiian Home Lands. A statement of issues and procedural schedule can be found in [Order No. 38323](#).

(Docket No. 2022- 0037)

AirVoice Wireless Seeking to Become Eligible Telecommunications Carrier in Hawaii

In late March 2022, AirVoice Wireless filed a Petition for Designation as an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier (ETC) in the State of Hawaii.

AirVoice, a Michigan limited liability company, seeks ETC designation solely to provide Lifeline service to qualifying Hawaii consumers. The petition states, "products and plans will be specially geared toward serving lower income communities, especially in rural areas that are predominantly unserved by other ETCs designated in the state." The petition is pending approval by the PUC.

(Docket No. 2022-0048)

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>

PUC Denies Hu Honua Biomass Power Plant

On May 23, 2022, in the 164-page decision with one dissent, the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) denied the approval of the Amended and Restated Power Purchase Agreement between Hawaii Electric Light Company (HELCO) and Hu Honua.

Throughout the proceedings, the Consumer Advocate has been actively advocating for the best interest of the general public. The Consumer Advocate contends that the agreement is neither "just and reasonable" nor in the "best interest of the general public" because ratepayers would see an increase in their bills and, based on the current record, would not result in benefits exceeding costs.

Hu Honua President Warren Lee said he's extremely disappointed by the decision. Hu Honua and HELCO filed motions for reconsideration and the Consumer Advocate and participants filed responses to those motions. The PUC is anticipated to rule on the motions for reconsideration and there may be appeals filed with the Hawai'i Supreme Court.

(Docket No. 2017-0122)

Conditional Approval of Launiupoko Irrigation Rate Increase

On May 23, 2022, the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) conditionally approved a temporary rate increase for Launiupoko Irrigation.

To determine what temporary rate increase, if any, would allow Launiupoko to restore regular water service to its customers, the PUC directed Launiupoko to answer questions by May 2, 2022. In their response, Launiupoko asserted that they are not wasting available surface water, that the US Geological Service overstates the amount of water diverted, and that they will start pumping a permitted non-potable well immediately upon receiving the temporary rate increase.

In a previous order, the PUC cited several concerns about granting Launiupoko's request including a lack of sufficient evidence. Nearly two years after its initial application, the PUC found sufficient evidence to conditionally grant Launiupoko's requested rate increase.

The PUC notes that the sole purpose of this temporary rate increase is to allow Launiupoko to begin restoring service to its customers. Launiupoko is not authorized to charge Kuleana tenants for water and remains obligated to serve them. This and other conditions can be found in Order No. 38396.

(Docket No. 2020-0089)

LIHEAP & LIHWAP

The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) & the *new* Low-Income Home Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) Water Crisis Intervention programs provide financial assistance to eligible low-income households, especially those households that are most vulnerable, such as the elderly, the disabled, and households with young children.

A household may receive one of the following LIHEAP and LIHWAP payments per program year. Benefits are paid as a one-time only credit paid directly to the utility company of your choice.

Energy Crisis Intervention (ECI) & Water Crisis Intervention (WCI) assists households in crisis who have been or will be disconnected from electric, gas or water service.

*Applications for ECI & WCI are accepted year-round, but the number of approvals each month is limited.

Energy Credit (EC) assists households who are not in crisis but need bill payment assistance.

*Applications for LIHEAP Energy Credit are accepted once a year from June 1 – June 30.

Visit: <https://www.hcapweb.org/low-income-home-energy-assistance-program-liheap/> for more information.

UTILITY BILL ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE



The Division of Consumer Advocacy wants to inform consumers of available programs for those who may be in need of financial assistance. Please note that, due to the high demand for assistance, programs may quickly reach capacity.

Visit the Division of Consumer Advocacy website for up to date COVID-19 utility bill assistance

<https://cca.hawaii.gov/dca/covid-19-utility-assistance-programs/>.

DID YOU KNOW?

Hawaii Energy provides free community programs to help residents of all ages and backgrounds learn more about saving energy and how to put their knowledge into action. Check out more info at <https://hawaiienergy.com/education/community>.

Upcoming Dates of Interest

- **August 19, 2022 - Statehood Day** (State holiday, office will be closed)

Contact Us

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Federal Communications Commission (FCC)

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Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC)

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