



Consumer Chat

The Newsletter of the Ratepayer Advocate

ADVOCATE REPRESENTS CONSUMERS AT BPU PROCEEDINGS

This spring, the Division of the Ratepayer Advocate continues to serve as the public interest watchdog and is vigorously representing consumers in two proceedings at the Board of Public Utilities.

Customer Account Services Proceeding

Customer Account Services include the metering and billing of customers. With the deregulation of the electric and gas marketplace, we support customers having the opportunity to benefit from **choices** and **savings** gained through competition of all related services.

Choice - Unless customers' accounts are opened to competition, the incumbent utility company will retain an unfair advantage over competing suppliers.

Savings - Competition will increase opportunities for customer savings by creating incentives to find efficiencies in providing these services. It will also create incentives to develop new technologies.

Universal Service Fund Proceeding

A Universal Service Fund would assist low-income residential customers in obtaining or retaining energy service. Electricity and natural gas are lifeline services that are essential to the health and welfare of consumers. The Ratepayer Advocate supports low-income assistance programs that can make rates affordable to all consumers.

A statewide rate assistance program should include:

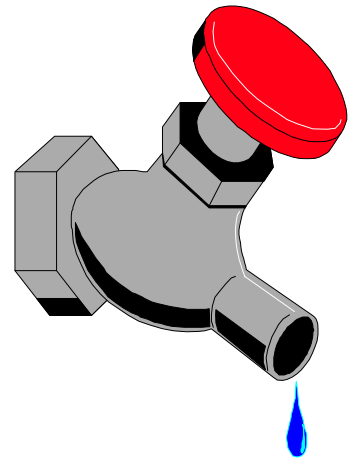
- basic affordable rate assistance
- emergency crisis intervention assistance
- energy efficiency assistance

Visit us on the web
<http://www.njin.net/rpa>

**Blossom A. Peretz, Esq.,
 Ratepayer Advocate
 State of New Jersey
 Div. of the Ratepayer Advocate
 31 Clinton Street, 11th floor
 P.O. Box 46005
 Newark, NJ 07101
 Tel. (973) 648-2690
 Fax (973) 624-1047
 e-mail: njratepayer@rpa.state.nj.us**

Water Conservation Tips

As summer approaches, it is time to start thinking about conserving our drinking water. As demonstrated by the drought of 1999, an abundant supply of water is no longer guaranteed. Demand for water is on the rise and New Jersey water resources are constantly being strained by the competing needs of the growing population. The less water we use, or abuse, the less we degrade this valuable resource.



Conserving water in the kitchen

- Fill the dishwasher before you turn it on.
- When boiling, use only enough water to cover the food.
- Repair any leaks in and around your taps and faucets.

Conserving water in the bathroom

- Save 10 to 20 gallons of water by filling a basin instead of letting the water run while shaving.
- Turn off the tap while brushing your teeth.
- A quick shower uses less hot water than a bath in a full tub.
- Flush the toilet only when necessary. Never use it as a wastebasket.

Conserving water in the utility room

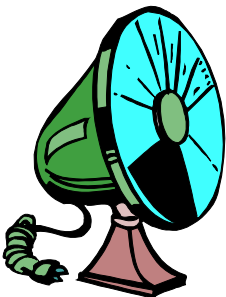
- Select a washing machine with conservation features, such as load size selector.
- Insulate your hot water tank and hot water pipes to reduce water-heating costs and save water. The insulation keeps the water warm longer and you use less water waiting for it to reach the desired temperature.

Conserving water outdoors

- A timed sprinkler saves water and reduces water waste.
- Substitute less water-demanding materials for grass. Ground covers, mulches, rocks, and wood can be used to enhance your yard.

Save Energy and Minimize Home Cooling Costs

It is time to start thinking about how to cool your home without spending a fortune on air conditioning. Before the hot weather hits, consider the following alternative cooling methods:



- Install an attic fan
- Use ceiling fans in rooms that are used the most
- Open doors and windows for cross ventilation
- Close off rooms that are rarely used
- Avoid using the oven during the warmest times of the day



New Rules Protect Local Phone Service

There are new rules in New Jersey that will make it easier for New Jersey residents to maintain their local phone service when they are unable to pay long distance charges.

The new rules will only permit phone companies to disconnect local service when customers fail to pay local service bills.

Phone companies will be prohibited from disconnecting local phone service when a customer does not pay charges for toll and long distance charges or optional services, such as call waiting. The rules will also require phone companies to alter their bill formats so that customers can easily determine how much they owe for local, toll, long distance, and optional services.

In 1999, unpaid phone bills resulted in suspension of phone service for a total of 536,451 residential phone lines in New Jersey.

“These new rules recognize the lifeline nature of telephone service and the importance of access to local phone services for all New Jersey consumers,” Ratepayer Advocate Blossom Peretz said. “No consumer who pays for basic local service should be cut-off from the ability to access 911, a child’s school, or an ailing parent.”

Refunds for some AT&T Cable Customers

AT&T Cable Services of New Jersey will refund more than \$244,000 to customers in the regional cable systems of Gloucester, Maple Shade, Long Beach Island, and Wildwood.

The settlement agreement was reached between the Division of the Ratepayer Advocate, AT&T Cable Services of New Jersey and the Board of Public Utilities staff.

“We are pleased we were able to resolve these long-standing issues,” Ratepayer Advocate Blossom Peretz said. “AT&T Cable customers in parts of the state will receive substantial refunds for charges that pre-date AT&T’s ownership of the systems. We are especially pleased to have reached a settlement with AT&T that brings rate relief through refunds and price caps.”



Customer basic rate refunds will range from \$6.49 to \$11.00 and some current basic service rates will be frozen through May 31, 2001.

MAY 12 Event

What: Third Annual Utilities Summit:
**Energy and Telecommunications
Opportunities for Local Governments**

Sponsored by:

The New Jersey State League of Municipalities in
association with the Division of the Ratepayer
Advocate

When: Friday, May 12, 2000
8:30 a.m.- 1p.m.

Where: The Sheraton at Woodbridge Place
515 Route 1 South
Iselin, NJ

This program will include discussions on municipal energy aggregation, telecommunications opportunities for local government and negotiating cable franchise agreements. Panelists will range from state legislators and municipal officials to experts in the utilities fields. This program is targeted to inform municipal officials, legislators and staff, and consumer groups about new advancements and changes in the energy and telecommunications marketplace.

To attend, please call the New Jersey State League of Municipalities at (609) 695-3481.



● **REQUEST A SPEAKER FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION'S COMMUNITY OUTREACH:**

The Division of the Ratepayer Advocate is available to speak to your group on a variety of utility topics. We can tailor topics to fit your organization's needs.

Name _____

Organization _____

Topic of Interest _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Phone number _____

***Please fax your request to (973) 624-1047 or mail to:
N.J. Division of the Ratepayer Advocate
P.O. Box 46005
Newark, N.J. 07101***

