



**Contact: Angela Speir**  
Phone 404-656-4512  
Fax 404-656-3020

## **Georgia Public Service Commission**

244 Washington St., S.W.  
Atlanta, Georgia 30334  
Phone: 404-656-4501  
Toll free: 800-282-5813  
<http://www.psc.state.ga.us>

From the Office of Commissioner Angela Speir  
**News Release**

### **Commissioner Angela Speir Issues Statement on Natural Gas Late Fee Rulemaking**

Atlanta, December 7, 2004 – Today in an effort to protect Georgia consumers, Commissioner Angela Speir initiated a rule making procedure to prevent natural gas customers from being charged large late fees on small balances. The proposed rule making would increase the minimum balance from \$10.00 to \$30.00 on past due accounts on which natural gas marketers can charge a late fee. “I believe this threshold strikes a reasonable fair balance, one which a majority of this Commission can support and one that will protect consumers from being gouged.” A majority of the five-member Commission approved the issuance of the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking.

“Late fees have been a matter of concern since deregulation began. Both the Commission and members of the Legislature received numerous complaints regarding late fees,” Speir added. Commissioner Speir says she initiated this rule change after her office received a complaint from a consumer who was assessed a \$10.00 late fee on a late balance of less than five cents. She noted that the Commission’s Consumer Affairs section has received numerous complaints from consumers charged \$10 late fees on equally small past due balances. The Commission properly concluded that this was unreasonable and approved a rule in 2003 setting a late balance threshold of \$10.00 before a late fee could be assessed. Commissioner Speir added, “While this rule was a step in the right direction, the Commission recognized that it did not go far enough to correct the problem and we issued this Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NOPR) so that we could gather more information and refine our rule.”

Commissioner Speir further added, “Commission staff provided information that the average monthly residential bill with no consumption, that is, the Atlanta Gas Light base charge plus the marketer customer service charge, averages \$27.88. Based on this average monthly amount, I believe that an appropriate past due balance threshold for assessing a late fee should be \$30.00.”

The Commission will accept comments on the proposed rule until January 13, 2005. If no changes are made, the Commission would vote on final adoption at its regular Administrative Session on January 18, 2005.

Commissioner Speir is serving her first six-year term on the Commission having been elected in November 2002. She is the first woman elected to the Commission and the second Republican woman elected to statewide office. She is a native of Dekalb County and currently resides in Gwinnett County.

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