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**Consumer Rights**  
**Electric, Natural Gas and Telephone**  
(A Handbook)

***“For the Common Good of Customers and  
Utility Companies”***



**Georgia Public Service Commission**

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## **Foreword**

The Georgia Public Service Commission (PSC) is pleased to make this handbook, a synopsis of its rules, available to the citizens of Georgia to help them protect themselves from abuses which may arise in the investor-owned electric, investor-owned natural gas, and telecommunications industries.

Consumers are expected to meet their obligations to their utility service providers in a timely manner. However, should the occasion arise where they are unable to do so, rules have been enacted to make sure utility service providers act in a reasonable manner when engaging their customers regarding collection activities (late fees, disconnections, etc.).

Knowledgeable consumers who are empowered with information are better able to protect themselves from “unscrupulous players” when interacting with their utility service providers. Knowledge levels the playing field in the often confusing arena of utility services.

You may view or download the entire set of the PSC’s rules online at [www.psc.state.ga.us](http://www.psc.state.ga.us), or you may purchase a copy of the rules by making a request to the Records Room at 404-656-4532.

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## Electric Industry

The following rules apply only to Georgia Power Company.

**Disconnection**

515-3-2-.01

Bill for service is not paid within at least 45 days after the date of the bill.

**Notice Requirement**

515-3-2-.02

Written notice of proposed disconnect provided at least five (5) days prior to date of disconnection. Utility makes good-faith effort to make personal contact at least two (2) days prior to the proposed disconnect date.

**Disconnection During Illness**

515-3-2-.03

Service shall not be disconnected for nonpayment when the company receives written notice from a healthcare provider certifying the illness would be aggravated by the discontinuance of service. The disconnection shall be held the shorter of either the duration of the illness or one month from the date of the notice. Customer may renew postponement period one additional time.

**Seasonal Restriction**

515-3-2-.04(1)

Between November 15 and March 15, customers may sign an agreement to pay past due balance in equal installments beginning with first billing period after March 15; concluding by October 15.

**Summer**

515-3-2-.04(2)

A utility shall not discontinue electric service to a residential customer if, prior to 8:00 A.M. on the date of the scheduled disconnection, a National Weather Service Heat Advisory or Excessive Heat Warning is in effect, or is forecasted to be in effect by the National Weather Service, for the county in which the meter scheduled for disconnection is located.

Customer agrees in writing to pay all bills by due date for current service received after signing agreement. Failure to comply can result in service interruption without notice.

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## Electric Continued

515-3-2-.04(3)

If the forecasted low local temperature for a 24-hour period beginning at 8:00 a.m. on the date of proposed disconnect is below 32°F, service shall not be disconnected on that day.

**Billing --  
Past Due  
Date**

A bill is past due if it remains unpaid 21 days from the statement date.

**Late Fee**

Georgia Power's late fee is 1.5% of balance on bills greater than \$100.

**Deposit**

The maximum deposit is two-and-one-half-twelfths (2.5 times) the average monthly bill.

**Interest Rate**

Interest shall accrue on all deposits held on the customer's Georgia Power Company's account.

**Senior Citizen  
Discount**

The monthly senior citizen discount for households with total household incomes of \$14,355 or less is \$14.00 per month for Georgia Power's seniors. Senior must be 65 years of age or older and the bill must be in the senior's name. Also, you get a \$6.00 fuel credit per month.

**Budget Billing**

A payment option that is available to customers who want the convenience of paying the same bill amount each month. The monthly amount is based upon the customer's rolling twelve-month average bill. At the end of the specified period, the customer's account is "trued up."

**Flat Bill**

A payment option that allows a consumer to pay the same amount each month for electricity usage for a specified period of time. The bill is based upon the customer's twelve-month average bill plus a premium which may be as much as 10%. There is no true-up at the end of the contract period. If you pay more for electric service than what you used the amount that you have overpaid will not be credited to your account.

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## Natural Gas Industry

The following rules apply to customers of Atmos Energy and customers of Natural Gas Marketers operating in Atlanta Gas Light Company's delivery area.

**Disconnection**

515-3-3-.01

Bill for service is not paid within at least 45 days after the date of the bill.

**Notice Requirement**

Local Distribution Co.  
(Atmos Energy)  
515-3-3-.02(A)

Written notice of proposed disconnect provided at least five (5) days prior to date of disconnection. Utility makes good-faith effort to make personal contact at least two (2) days prior to the proposed disconnect date.

**Notice Requirement**

Electing Distribution Co.  
(Atlanta Gas Light Co.) and  
Natural Gas Marketers  
515-3-3-.02(B)

(a) Written notice of proposed disconnect provided at least fifteen (15) days prior to date of disconnection. Utility makes good-faith effort to make personal contact at least two (2) days prior to the proposed disconnect date. (a6) Contact information for agencies where consumers may seek assistance with paying bill, including the contact information for the Department of Human Resources. (a7) Statement that consumer is entitled to at least one reasonable payment in writing prior to disconnection. (a8) A statement that qualified low-income residential consumers may transfer to the Regulated Provider without termination of service.

**Disconnection During  
Illness**

515-3-3-.03

Service shall not be disconnected for nonpayment when the company receives written notice from a healthcare provider certifying the illness would be aggravated by the discontinuance of service. The disconnection shall be held the shorter of either the duration of the illness or one month from the date of the notice. Customer may renew postponement period an additional time.

**Seasonal Restriction**

515-3-3-.04(1)

Between November 15 and March 15, customers may sign an agreement to pay past due balance in equal installments beginning with first billing period after March 15; concluding by October 15.

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**Natural Gas continued**

515-3-2-.04(3) If the forecasted low local temperature for a 48 hour period beginning at 8:00 a.m. on the date of proposed disconnect is below 32°F, service shall not be disconnected on that day.

**The following rules apply only to Natural Gas Marketers  
Operating in Atlanta Gas Light Company's Delivery Area**

**Billing**

**Service Quality Standards**

515-7-6-.02(a)(1)

A bill is past due if it remains unpaid more than 20 days from the date the bill was mailed.

515-7-6-.02(a)(4)d6

The bill shall readily identify the exact amount of the base charge that is being charged by the electing distribution company for that particular retail customer.

515-7-6-.02(a)(5)

The competitive retail natural gas service charges billed to a customer shall not exceed the marketer's published price in effect at the beginning of the customer's meter reading cycle.

515-7-6-.02(a)(10)

The late fee assessed by a marketer shall not exceed \$10 or 1.5% of the past due balance, whichever is greater. A marketer shall not apply a late fee on bills less than \$30.

**Consumer Rights**

515-7-6-.04(a)

A marketer shall allow customers equal time to pay charges that were not timely billed. Marketer shall not access late fees, interest or undertake collection efforts during this period of time.

515-7-6-.04(b)

Customers who receive a "corrected" bill are given at least 90 days from the date a corrected bill is rendered to pay. Marketer shall not access late fees, interest or undertake collection efforts during this period of time.

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## Natural Gas continued

515-7-6-.04(e)

A marketer shall have 30 days to correct a billing error it discovers or that is brought to its attention. During the period the billing error is being disputed, the marketer shall not access late fees, interest or undertake collection efforts during this period of time.

### Terms of Service

#### Minimum Standards

515-7-9-.02(1)

In any advertisement, offer or agreement, a marketer shall specify a time limit by which any sales promotion item will be honored.

515-7-9-.02(2)

A marketer shall not charge a consumer a service charge relating to a change from a previous marketer if such consumer has not changed marketers within the previous 12 months.

515-7-9-.02(4)(a)

When the expiration date of a fixed term agreement is approaching or if the marketer proposes changes to its terms of service, the marketer shall provide advance written notification at least two billing cycles, or 60 days, prior to the date of expiration. Additionally, 25 days prior to expiration of the fixed term agreement, written notification, separately mailed, shall be provided that includes the price-per-therm that's being offered.

515-7-9-.02(4)(b)

In cases where a consumer does not make a preference known, the marketer shall not place the consumer on a new fixed term agreement unless provided for in the current fixed term agreement. If the consumer is "rolled over" into a new fixed term agreement, the marketer shall be prohibited from charging an exit fee or early termination fee for a period of 90 days from the beginning of the new fixed term agreement. Additionally, the duration of the new fixed term agreement shall not exceed the duration of the current fixed term agreement.

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515-7-9-.02(6)

A marketer shall not charge cancellation fees to low-income residential consumers seeking service for the

**Natural Gas continued**

first time from the Regulated Provider. A cancellation fee shall not be charged to any consumer who terminates service to relocate to another residence and does not change marketer.

**Right to Rescission**  
515-7-9-.05

Consumers shall have three days to cancel the agreement from the date the consumer receives either enrollment materials, notice of a change of terms and conditions, or notice of any new or additional charges.

**Regulated Provider Eligibility**

To be served as a Group 1 customer, one must be the income guidelines established under the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) – 150% of the Federal poverty level.

To be served as a Group 2 customer, one must be unable to obtain or maintain natural gas service.

**Deposit**

For a Group 1 customer, the deposit is \$100.00; for a Group 2 customer, the deposit is \$150.00

**Senior Citizen Discount**

Seniors who are at least 65 years of age with a total household income of \$14,355 or less are eligible for a discount of up to \$14.00 off the monthly Atlanta Gas Light Company's base charge.

**Senior Citizen Discount (Atmos Energy)**

Seniors who are at least 65 years of age with a total household income of \$14,355 or less are eligible to receive a waiver of the \$7.00 monthly customer charge.

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## Telecommunications Industry

Telephone companies providing local service (dial tone) in Georgia are required to abide by the following rule.

### **Billing**

#### **Itemized Statement**

The telecommunications company shall provide the customer with a breakdown of local service charges upon request. Statements itemizing message toll charges, if applicable, shall be included in bills to customers.

515-12-1-.04(4)(a)

#### **Delayed Bill**

If a company is delayed in billing a customer, the company must offer arrangements equal to the length of time the bill is delayed.

515-12-1-.04(4)(c)

#### **Non-Regulated Charges**

Basic local service may not be denied, interrupted or discontinued for failure to pay any portion of the charges billed as non-regulated and/or non-telecommunication charges. Partial payments of bills rendered shall be applied to amounts owed for basic local exchange services before applying to non-regulated and/or non-telecommunication charges.

515-12-1-.04(4)(d)

515-12-1-.04(4)(e)

Customer may be required to pay undisputed portion of bill to avoid disconnection of service.

#### **Deposit**

The deposit may not exceed two-and-one-half-twelfths (2.5 times) the average monthly bill during a twelve month period.

515-12-1-.05(4)

#### **Interest Rate**

Interest shall be paid at the rate of 7% per annum. At customer's request, interest may be credited annually to the amount of the next bill following the accrual date.

515-12-1-.05(4)(b)

#### **Interest Refund**

After discontinuance of service and following rendition of the final bill, the utility shall promptly and automatically refund the deposit plus accrued interest.

515-12-1-.05(a)

515-12-1-.05(b)

After customer has paid bills for service for twelve consecutive bills without having had service discontinued

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## **Telecommunications continued**

for nonpayment or had more than one occasion in which the a bill was late, the utility shall annually and automatically refund the deposit with accrued interest, if applicable, shall be included in bills to customers.

### **Reasons for Denying Service**

Service may be refused or discontinued for the following reasons:

- 515-12-1-.06(a) Without notice if use of equipment in a manner that adversely affects the utility's service to others.
- 515-12-1-.06(b) Without notice if equipment furnished and owned by the company is tampered with.
- 515-12-1-.06(c) Violation of or noncompliance with Commission's rules and regulations.
- 515-12-1-.06(d) Failure to comply with municipal ordinances or other laws pertaining to telephone service.
- 515-12-1-.06(e) Failure to permit the utility reasonable access to its equipment.
- 515-12-1-.06(f) For nonpayment of bill.
- 515-12-1-.06(g) Failure to establish credit on request for initial or additional service.

### **Insufficient Reasons for Denying Service**

Service may not be refused, denied or discontinued for the following reasons:

- 515-12-1-.07(a) Nonpayment for service by a previous occupant at the same premises to be served; except one who is a close relative or member of the same family of the applicant;
- 515-12-1-.07(b) Failure to pay directory advertising charges;

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515-12-1-.07(c)

Existing service shall not be disconnected due solely to the indebtedness of another customer if such indebtedness occurred subsequent to the establishment of existing

### **Telecommunication continued**

service. Application for residential telephone service may be refused to a person residing at the same address with a former customer whose service had been denied previously by the utility.

**515-12-1-10**

### **Directories.**

(3)(a) On an annual basis, local exchange companies shall issue, or arrange to have issued, telephone directories as described in paragraph (1). Upon such issuance, local exchange companies shall distribute, or arrange to have distributed, a copy of each directory to all customers served by that directory and shall furnish two copies of each directory to the Commission; provided, however, that this obligation shall not apply to the distribution of copies of residential directories that serve communities for which the combined population is more than 50,000 people. For customers within such communities, a local exchange company shall distribute, or arrange to have distributed, printed directories free of charge to requesting customers served by that directory. The local exchange company and its affiliate distributing such directories shall not market services to such requesting customers, and will: (i) accept electronic files from competing carriers identifying such requesting customers; (ii) accept those telephone calls from competing carriers where the requesting customers are on the line; and (iii) arrange with the carrier and the customers for the provision of directories to the customers. Furthermore, prior to discontinuing the distribution of copies of residential directories that serve such communities, a local exchange company shall execute, or arrange to have executed, reasonable measures to transition affected customers to a system in which they will not receive the residential directory, except upon request.

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These reasonable measures shall include notification that the directories will be distributed only upon request, that distribution upon request will be free of charge, and the phone number and e-mail address affected customers may use to request a copy of the directories. This notification shall be included in a bill insert or a bill message and on the local exchange company's website.

### **Telecommunication continued**

(b) In communities with combined populations of 50,000 or fewer people, a local exchange company may petition the Commission to exempt it from the obligation to distribute copies of residential directories to affected customers. The Commission may grant such a petition only upon a showing of the following:

1. The number of affected customers who use the directory is not significant,
2. Affected customers will have a reasonable and practical alternative to access the information contained in the directory;
3. The petitioning local exchange company will execute reasonable measures to transition customers to a system in which they will not receive the residential directory, except upon request; and
4. Upon approval of the petition, the petitioning local exchange company will provide printed directories to requesting customers served by that directory free of charge, regardless of the local exchange company serving such customers; provided, further, that the petitioning local exchange company and its affiliates will not market services to such requesting customers, and will accept electronic files from competing carriers identifying such requesting customers, and the carrier will accept those telephone calls from competing carriers where the requesting customers are on the line and will arrange with the carrier and the customers for the provision of directories to the customers.

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(c) In the event that the Commission grants a local exchange company's petition under paragraph (3)(b), any other local exchange companies served by the petitioning local exchange company's directory shall have no obligation to distribute a directory to their customers within the applicable distribution area.

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## Telecommunication continued

515-12-1-.10(7)	In the event of an error in the listed number, the telephone utility shall intercept all calls to the listed number for a reasonable period of time provided existing central office equipment will permit and the number is not in service.
<b>Disconnection Unpaid Balance</b> 515-12-1-.28(a)	Bill for service is not paid at least 29 days from the date of the bill.
<b>Notice Requirement</b> 515-12-1-.28(b)/(c)	Written notice of proposed disconnect provided at least five (5) days prior to date of disconnection. Utility makes good-faith effort to make personal contact at least two (2) days prior to the proposed disconnect date.
<b>Disconnection During Illness</b> 515-12-1-.28(d)	Service shall not be disconnected for nonpayment when the company receives written notice from a healthcare provider certifying the illness would be aggravated by the discontinuance of service. The disconnection shall be held the shorter of either the duration of the illness or one month from the date of the notice. Customer may renew postponement period one additional time.
<b>Pay Arrangement</b> 515-12-1-.28(f)	Service may not be disconnected for unpaid local service if the consumer notifies the company between the date of receiving the disconnection notice and the proposed disconnect date and agrees to pay the unpaid balance in equal installments over three consecutive billing months immediately following said notice. Customer further agrees to not make tolls in excess of \$10.00 until the past due balance has been satisfied. If tolls exceed \$10.00, service may be disconnected without notice.
<b>Extended Area Service</b>  515-12-1-.29(4)(a)	There are four ways to get the Commission to consider expanding your local calling area:  A petition signed by at least 10 percent (10%) of the subscribers in the exchange from which the petition originates. Petition shall include the names and telephone numbers of each signer;

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**Telecommunication continued**

- 515-12-1-.29(b) A petition, request or resolution adopted by and filed with the Commission by any elected representative or governing body of a political subdivision which is served, in whole or in part, by any exchange(s);
- 515-12-1-.29(c) A petition filed by one or more telephone companies that have jurisdiction over at least one exchange sought to be included in EAS; or
- 515-12-1-.29(d) A petition, request or resolution filed by any regional, county, city or other Chamber of Commerce or Development Authority representing at least one of the exchanges sought to be afforded EAS.
- Institutional Telecommunications Services (ITS) Charges**
- 515-12-1-.30(6) Telephone service provided at an institution for use by inmates to make collect only or debit system calls.  
The surcharge and rate charged the customer for any local (intraLATA/interLATA) collect call shall not exceed the \$2.20 surcharge plus \$0.50 coin rate per call.
- 515-12-1-.30(7) The surcharge and per minute rate charged the customer for any intraLATA toll collect call shall not exceed the \$2.05 surcharge plus \$0.2025 per minute.
- 515-12-1-.30(8) The surcharge and per minute rate charged the customer for any interLATA toll collect call shall not exceed the \$2.05 charge plus \$0.2300 per minute.
- 515-12-1-.30(10) For any rate change, price quotes up front to call recipients on every call must be provided for at least thirty (30) days without requiring a response to a prompt. The general prison population must be given notice of any rate change(s).
- 515-12-1-.30(11) The name of the carrier handling the call should be stated before the customer incurs any charges and at the conclusion of the call.

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**Telecommunication continued**

515-12-1-.30(12)	ITS provider must provide a push or voice prompt that fully discloses the rate to be charged for the call, including surcharges, prior to the customer accepting a call and incurring any expense.
515-12-1-.30(13)(a)	Telephone must provide outward-only capability.
<b>Call Termination</b> 515-12-1-.30(13)(b)	Where call termination is deemed appropriate by the institution's administration, limit call duration to a 15 minute interval, unless another time interval is specifically requested by the institution's administration.
<b>Security Features</b> 515-12-1-.30(18)	Notification, once per year, that certain security features inherent to the institution's telecommunications system may result in the disconnection of calls, such as: use of 3-way calling; use of call transfer; calls put on hold; answering call waiting; use of cellular phones, use of cordless phones, depressing any extra numbers on the keypad; extended periods of silence.
<b>Automatic Dialing and Announcing Devices</b> 515-12-1-32	A device used for the purpose of automatically selecting or dialing telephone numbers and disseminating pre-recorded messages.
515-12-1-32(b)	No calls are to be made between the hours of 9:00 p.m. and 8:00 a.m.
515-12-1-32(e)	The telephone number given to the called party to contact during normal business hours must be answered by a person who is willing and able to provide information on the call.
515-12-1-32(f)	The equipment shall be programmed to automatically disconnect a called party's line no later than 10 seconds after the called party fails to give consent for playing a record message or hangs up.
515-12-1-32(g)	Within 25 seconds after the called party answers and at the conclusion of the call, the name and telephone number of

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the individual or firm making or paying for the call must be clearly stated.

**Telecommunication continued**

**Restrictions**

515-14-1-.03(a)

No person or entity shall make or cause to be made any telephone solicitation to the telephone line of any residential, mobile or wireless subscriber whose telephone number is on the Federal Do Not Call Registry.

515-14-1-.03(c)

Persons or entities making telephone solicitations in this State to residential, mobile or wireless subscribers are prohibited from blocking or otherwise circumventing said subscribers' use of a caller identification service.

**Notice of Objection**

515-14-1-.04(a)

A residential, mobile and wireless telephone subscriber may give notice of objection by placing his or her telephone number in the single national database established by the Federal Communications Commission.

**Charge**

There is no charge to place your telephone number in the Do Not Call Registry. Your telephone number remains on the list until you remove it.

**How to Register**

**Call** from the number you wish to register with the Do Not Call Registry, dial 1-888-382-1222 or 1-866-290-4236 (TTY), or online at [www.donotcall.gov](http://www.donotcall.gov) and follow the instructions.

**Georgia  
Telecommunications  
Relay Service (TRS)**

A service that facilitates communications between hearing and/or speech impaired citizens with the general population.

CapTel is also a service available through TRS. It works like any other phone with one important difference. Using the latest in voice recognition software, CapTel displays every word the caller says. So you can hear what's being said and read the captioned conversation on a bright display screen. Best of all, the CapTel captioning service is free.

**Access**

Dial 7-1-1 to initiate your telephone call or to get a better understanding of how the service operates.

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## Telecommunication continued

*Equipment  
Distribution  
Program*

If you qualify, you may be able to acquire equipment at no cost to you through the Georgia Telecommunications Equipment Distribution Program. Contact the Georgia Council for the Hearing Impaired, Inc. for further details at 404-297-9461 V/TTY or 800-541-0710 V/TTY.

*Funding Source*

The Relay Service and Equipment Distribution Programs are funded through a surcharge on telephone subscribers' monthly telephone bills.

**Countywide  
Calling**

Calls that begin and end within the same county are considered local calls. No charges apply. You may be charged for calls within the county that originates from payphones.

**Unsolicited  
Facsimiles**

State law prohibits the transmission of unsolicited facsimiles. If you receive an unsolicited fax, ask the entity to place your name on its "do not fax" list. If you receive another fax from that company, report it to your local telephone company

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## Other Resources

Following is a list of entities that may be able to provide you with assistance in matters which this Commission has no jurisdiction:

AT&T Customer Service.....	800-222-0300 .....	<a href="http://www.att.com">www.att.com</a>
Better Business Bureau .....	404-688-4910 .....	<a href="http://www.bbb.org">www.bbb.org</a>
Cable TV Association.....	404-252-4371 .....	<a href="http://www.gacable.com">www.gacable.com</a>
Department of Motor Vehicle .....	678-413-6575 .....	<a href="http://www.dmv.state.ga.us">www.dmv.state.ga.us</a>
Energy Assistance Program .....	404-657-9358 .....	<a href="http://www.dhr.georgia.gov">www.dhr.georgia.gov</a>
Federal Communications Commission .....	888-225-5322 .....	<a href="http://www.fcc.gov">www.fcc.gov</a>
Federal Trade Commission .....	877-382-4357 .....	<a href="http://www.ftc.gov">www.ftc.gov</a>
GA Electric Membership Corporation.....	888-896-5997 .....	<a href="http://www.opc.com">www.opc.com</a>
Georgia Power Customer Service .....	888-660-5890 .....	<a href="http://www.georgiapower.com">www.georgiapower.com</a>
Georgia Propane Gas Association.....	404-645-8677 .....	<a href="http://www.georgiapropane.org">www.georgiapropane.org</a>
MCI Customer Service.....	800-444-3333 .....	<a href="http://www.mci.com">www.mci.com</a>
State of Georgia Information.....	404-656-2000 .....	<a href="http://www.georgia.gov">www.georgia.gov</a>
U. S. Sprint Customer Service .....	800-877-4646 .....	<a href="http://www.sprint.com">www.sprint.com</a>
United Way .....	404-614-1027 .....	<a href="http://www.unitedwayatlanta.org">www.unitedwayatlanta.org</a>
Utility Protection Center.....	800-282-7411 .....	<a href="http://www.gaupc.com">www.gaupc.com</a>

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## **Notes**

This handbook was updated June 2010.

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*Public Service Commissioners*

Robert “Bobby” Baker, Jr.  
Chuck Eaton  
H. Doug Everett  
Lauren “Bubba” McDonald, Jr.  
Stan Wise



Deborah Flannagan, Executive Director  
Tom Bond, Director, Utilities Division  
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Back Cover Art Work: In Memory of Nakeisha Bowman, Consumer Affairs