



GPSC News

Making Business and Safety Decisions Affecting Tomorrow

Spring 2003

Volume 2 Issue 4

Senate Bill 272

* Telemarketing law

*Includes mobile or wireless devices

*Unauthorized selling of list is a misdemeanor

*Allows Commission discretion in setting fees for distributing list to telemarketers

*Passes General Assembly unanimously

Legislature Enacts Commission Bill

The 2003 General Assembly has unanimously approved Senate Bill 272, the Commission sponsored measure that amends the Georgia No Call Telemarketing Law. The bill awaits the Governor's

signature. The measure allows consumers to list includes mobile or wireless communications devices as well as residential telephones on the No Call List. The bill also makes it a misdemeanor for

unauthorized persons to sell the No Call List, punishable by a year in jail or a \$1,000 fine. The proposal also allows the Commission discretion in setting

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Commission Considers Proposed Atmos Settlement

The Commission is considering a proposal to settle issues stemming from the December 17, 2002 explosion at a Gainesville residence that claimed one life and seriously injured another person. Commissioners on April 8 heard testimony on the proposed stipulation with Atmos Energy. The Commission is scheduled to issue a decision at its May 6 Administrative Session.



Patricia Childers, Atmos Energy; John McCarter, PSC Staff; Danny McGriff, Director of Pipeline Safety testify

The stipulation as now written calls for Atmos to contribute \$195,000 for a

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Energy America Hearings Set

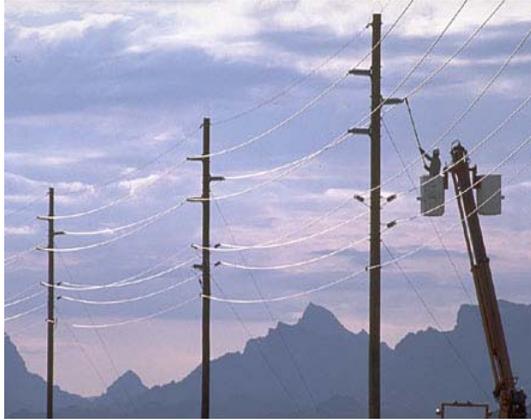
The Commission will hold hearings May 13-14, 2003 to hear evidence that natural gas marketer Energy America violated Geor-

gia law and Commission rules. The Commission will hear evidence on 14 cases of "slamming," the unauthorized changing of a customer's preferred

natural gas marketer. The marketer could face fines of up to \$15,000 for each violation.

Electric Transmission Line Bills To Be Studied Over Summer

Legislators will study proposals dealing with state oversight of electric transmission lines over the summer. House Bill 373 did pass the House and head to the Senate, where it has been assigned to the Senate Regulated Industries and Utilities Committee. Lawmakers gave final approval to a Senate resolution which creates the Senate Electric Line Location Study Committee. The measure, sponsored by Senator Renee Unterman (R-Loganville), calls for a fifteen member committee which



would meet for 5 days and sub-

If you have a story for the next GPSC News, please send to Bill Edge, bille@psc.state.ga.us. Next issue deadline is July 15, 2003.

mit a report by December 31, 2003.

Commissioners and Commission staff members worked with legislators and citizens in trying to address concerns on the myriad of bills that lawmakers introduced. The Commission is concerned that many of the proposals require additional expertise that, in light of the current serious state budget shortfall, state lawmakers are unlikely to provide the Commission with any extra monies to carry out those functions.

Commission To Consider Atmos Energy Settlement

(Continued from page 1)

statewide Spanish gas safety program. Commission Chairman Robert Baker is proposing that the \$195,000 settlement payment be used to provide rate relief for Atmos Customers. Atmos Energy supplies gas to more than 70,000 customers in Georgia in Columbus and Gainesville.

Legislature Passes PSC Bill

(Continued from page 1)

the fees to be charged to telemarketers who are required to subscribe to the No Call List. We appreciate the efforts of Senator Mitch Seabaugh, chair of the Senate Regulated Utilities Committee, and State Representative David Lucas,



chair of the House Public Utilities and Telecommunications Committee, in passing this legislation through the General Assembly. The Georgia No Call Program

Lawmakers Approve Amended FY 2003 Budget

The General Assembly approved the Fiscal Year 2003 Amended Budget which slashes state spending by more than \$250 million from the original budget adopted last year due to falling state

revenues. Lawmakers cut the Commission's 2003 budget by more than \$480,000. Cuts include a reduction of \$91,795 in regular operating expenses, \$44,426 in motor vehicle purchases, a \$116,377 cut in per diem and fees and an

austerity cut of an additional \$183,590. The amended budget did include an increase in funding for the Georgia No Call Program of \$122,500. State revenues have increased slightly since January but will still fall about \$260 million short of projections for this fiscal



Commission Decisions

Commission Accepts Stipulation To Resolve Violations Of Natural Gas Consumers' Relief Act By Georgia Natural Gas

The Commission February 18 accepted a stipulation between the Commission and Georgia Natural Gas to resolve complaints from six of the company's customers whose gas service was disconnected in error for non-payment, a violation of the Natural Gas Consumers' Relief Act. The stipulation requires Georgia Natural Gas to contribute \$10,000 to the

Low Income Heat Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and to credit the customers' accounts by various amounts. The stipulation also covers at least 225 additional customers who were disconnected in error. The Commission approved an amendment by Commissioner David Burgess that would credit the accounts of all consumers disconnected in error between September 23, 2002 and February 17, 2003,

providing direct customer credits in the neighborhood of \$44,500.

Georgia Natural Gas has also agreed in the stipulation that it will modify its billing and customer service systems in order to prevent future occurrences of erroneous disconnections.

PSC Approves Energy Assistance Grants For Low-Income Consumers

The Commission February 4 unanimously approved a \$5 million disbursement from the Universal Service Fund to the Georgia Department of Human Resources (DHR) for energy assistance to low-income consumers. \$3 million will be used to assist low-income senior citi-

zens in paying their winter heating bills while the remaining \$2 million will go to assist other low-income consumers. The Commission action is in accordance with the Natural Gas Consumers' Relief Act that authorizes the Commission to use the Universal Service Fund to assist low-income

residential consumers in times of emergency.

DHR will distribute the funds through the various Community Action Agencies located throughout the state. Consumers wishing to apply for assistance with their energy bills should contact DHR at 1-800-869-1150.

PSC Votes To Lower Rates For Connection To BellSouth Network

The Commission March 18 approved a staff recommendation lowering rates BellSouth charges to Competitive Local Phone Exchanges to connect to BellSouth's network. Commissioner David Burgess commented on the Commis-

sion's decision. "This action should provide competitive local telephone service to underserved areas of Georgia. We hope the competitive carriers will provide that service as a result of this Commission's action," Burgess said.

In other action, the Commission issued a new notice of rulemaking to determine if natural gas prices are constrained by market forces. Parties had until April 25, 2003 to file comments.

Consumer Affairs



We're Looking Out For Georgia's Citizens by Bernard Cameron

We're into the fifth year of natural gas deregulation and consumers are still being plagued by natural gas marketer activities that apparently violate state law and Commission rules. Some of these activities include: sending disconnect notices that violate Commission rules or state law; failing to provide reasonable payment arrangements prior to disconnecting service; charging

consumers a "weekly cents-per-therm" (of course, the majority of the therms were billed at a higher rate); disconnecting service although the bill was paid -- sometimes more than two weeks prior to the disconnection; slamming; and establishing a short due date which resulted in late fees being assessed. The list seems to be unending.

Thanks to a staff of committed employees, the Consumer Affairs Section is bringing natural gas marketers to answer the charges before the Commission. Recently, the Commission required a marketer to



refund or credit to consumers' accounts reconnection fees and deposits that were assessed as a result of erroneous disconnects. Additionally, some consumers received \$100 plus \$5 for each day they were without

service.

The Commission also ordered another marketer to determine which of its customers, who had a fixed rate plan, were not offered the option of renewing the fixed rate plan according to the provisions that were contained in their contracts. The marketer was ordered to make contact with consumers (both current and those who had switched to other marketers) and make them aware of the options to renew according to

the terms that were set forth in the consumers' contracts.

Yet a third marketer will be the subject of a hearing in May 2003 concerning allegations of slamming. This is not the first time this marketer has been before the Commission to address matters related to alleged slamming activities. In the 2000 case, the marketer agreed to a settlement that resulted in the creation of an energy fund in the amount \$75,000 to assist the mar-

keter's low-income senior citizens with paying their gas bills during the peak season. Additionally, the Commission ordered the marketer to pay Commission costs and expenses in an amount of equal to \$25,000.

Consumer Affairs has been successful in its effort to enforce Commission rules by utilizing a three-prong approach: education, technology and legal assistance. We developed an intense educational program for

staff engaged in handling complaints (Information and Referral Specialists and the Commissioners' Assistants) that focused on knowing Commission rules and state laws, documenting a complaint in the Consumer Response System (CRS) and gathering information (required questions to ask based upon type of complaint). From a technological stand-

point, service quality measures reports were developed in CRS to insure the integrity of the data. Also, we created a database of cases flagged as probable violations that is mainly used by the Operations Analysts to track the ongoing status of investigations. Finally, the assignment of staff attorneys to the unit has proven helpful in keeping Consumer

Affairs staff on solid legal ground when preparing cases for enforcement actions. While our initial focus has been on natural gas laws and rules, Consumer Affairs will use the same three-pronged approach to enforce telecom and electric complaints. After all, we're here to protect YOU...and Georgia's citizens.

Commission News



Green Power Settlement Conference

The Commission staff, Georgia Power and Savannah Electric & Power will hold a settlement conference on May 7, 2003 for Georgia Power Company's and Savannah Electric & Power Company's proposed Green Energy Programs. The Commission will hold a public hearing on May 21, 2003 and issue a decision in the dockets during a Special Administrative Session on May 29, 2003.

Commission Sets Hearing On ACN Allegations

The Commission on June 13 will hear evidence of alleged violations of Georgia law and Commission rules by natural gas marketer ACN Energy. The allegations include: that ACN Energy failed to send customers required disconnection notices; failed to offer reasonable payment arrangements in the disconnection notices; and failed to provide notice of payment centers in its disconnection notices.

BellSouth Drops Appeal; Commission Decision Stands

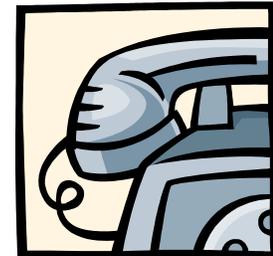
A federal appeals court in Atlanta March 17 accepted BellSouth's motion to dismiss its appeal of a Commission order that BellSouth violated the BellSouth/MCI Interconnection agreement by failing to pay reciprocal compensation for Internet Service Provider (ISP) traffic. This action means that the Commission's decision remains affirmed and the issue is resolved.

Commission Warns Of Telemarketing Fraud

The Commission is warning Georgia consumers to be aware of fraudulent telemarketing schemes involving registration for the Georgia No Call List. Some consumers have reported receiving telemarketing calls soliciting registration fees as much as \$300 for the Georgia No Call List. The solicitors have

also asked for personal information such as social security numbers. The Governor's Office of Consumer Affairs is investigating these reports.

Consumers who receive telephone calls soliciting registration for the Georgia No Call List should report the company to the Governor's Office of Con-



Telemarketer Scam Warning

sumer Affairs at: complaints@oca.state.ga.us or at 2 M.L. King, Jr. Drive, Atlanta, GA 30334.

Consumers should know that the Georgia No Call program **does not solicit** registrations over the telephone and the cost for a two-year sub-

scription is only **\$5**. Consumers are not required to disclose social security numbers in order to register.

Consumers can register for the program through the Internet at www.ganocall.com, by using the toll-free telephone number 1-877-GANOCALL (877-426-

6225), or by sending an application through the mail.

Since becoming operational in 1999, the Georgia No Call List has dramatically limited the number of telemarketing calls that can be placed to residential subscribers who have registered their objections to receiving telemarketing calls.



Commission Distributes First Telecommunications Equipment

The Commission on April 1 distributed the first set of telecommunications equipment from the new Telecommunications Equipment Distribution Program. Under House Bill 1003, approved by the 2002 Georgia General Assembly, the Commission oversees the distribution of specialized equipment to citizens of Georgia who, because of hearing and speech impairments, cannot otherwise communicate using ordinary telecommunications equipment. Jackie Watt received the first set of equipment from the program, an Ultratec Super-



(Left to right) Jennifer Whitcomb, executive director of GACHI; Bob Vaughan, PSC Program Administrator; Jackie Watt, recipient; Henry Carter, TEDP Coordinator

print Pro 80 LVD- Large Visual Display text telephone. Under the Program, the equipment remains the property of the State of Georgia and is loaned to recipients. Funding is provided through a surcharge on residential and business land based telephone subscribers. The Commission selected the Georgia Council for the Hearing Impaired, Inc. (GACHI) to distribute the equipment following a competitive bidding process. GACHI is a statewide non profit service organization.

2003 Graduates in the PSC Family

James Brandon Conley, Columbus State University. Son of Margie Conley, Human Resources. Begins graduate work in June at the University of Florida.

Johnny Davis, Therrell High, Atlanta. Son of Pat Welcome, Executive Secretary's office. Will attend Atlanta Area Tech on scholarship.

Krystle Edge, Shiloh High,

Snellville. Daughter of Bill Edge, Public Information Office

Bernard G. Hayman, William Penn High in New Castle, De. Grandson of Ruby Robinson, Assistant to Commissioner Burgess. Will attend University of Delaware.

Alysia Johnson, Cedar Grove High (DeKalb County). Daughter of Lillian Johnson, Telecom.

Joseph M. Peters, University of Georgia, December 2002. Stepson



of Tim Hopkins, Utility Finance.

Ben Stair, Holy Innocents' Episcopal School, Atlanta.

Son of Jeff Stair, attorney, Pipeline Safety.

Christina Tyer, Southwest DeKalb High School. Daughter of Nancy Tyer, Natural Gas. Will attend Georgia Tech.

Reginald Lewis Ammons II, Union Grove High School, DeKalb County. Nephew of Joyce Lewis, Consumer Affairs.

Everett Named to NARUC Committee Post

Commissioner Doug Everett has been named to the Electric Committee of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners. The Committee debates electric issues and makes recommendations to the Annual Convention.



Long Time Commission Employees Retire



(top)

Jackie Thomas and Chairman Baker share cake and stories during Jackie's retirement reception

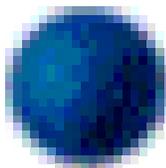
Commission staff members bid farewell to two long time Commission employees in the first quarter of this year. **Jackie Thomas**, Human Resources Manager, retired January 31 after 34 years here at the Commission. Jackie will be pursuing her doctoral degree at the University of Georgia.

Gilbert Bentley, utility engineer, retired February 27 with 34 years service with the Commission. He started at the Commission in 1971 after graduating from Georgia Tech.

Gilbert Bentley (right) Retired from the Commission after 34 years of service



PSC retiree Bev Knowles welcomes Gilbert into retirement



Pat's Welcome Wagon Corner



Pat Welcome shares one of her favorite recipes:

Butter Pecan Cookies

Ingredients:

- 1 cup butter, softened
- 2/3 cup packed brown sugar
- 1 egg
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 1/2 cups pecan halves

ONE POUND OF LOVING CARE

Directions:

- In a large bowl, cream butter, brown sugar and egg. Mix until well blended.
- Slowly add flour and salt and mix well. Cover and refrigerate for at least one hour.
- Preheat oven to 375 degrees F.
- Roll one inch pieces of dough into balls and

- place 2 inches apart on a cookie sheet. Flatten balls with the bottom of a glass dipped in flour. Press a pecan into top of dough.
- Blake 10 to 12 minutes until lightly browned
- Makes 24 servings

Commission News



Commission Calendar

Georgia State Holidays For 2003

News Year's Day	January 1
Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday	January 20
Confederate Memorial Day	April 28
Memorial Day	May 26
Independence Day	July 4
Labor Day	September 1
Columbus Day	October 13
Veterans Day	November 11
Thanksgiving	November 27
Robert E. Lee Birthday	November 28
Christmas	December 25
President's Day	December 26



May

- 6-Administrative Session
- 7-Green Power settlement conference
- 13-Energy America Rule Nisi
- 14-Energy America Rule Nisi
- 15-Committees
- 20-Administrative Session
- 29-Committees

June

- 3- Administrative Session
- 12-Committees

Commission Calendar

- 13-ACN Rule Nisi
- 17-Administrative Session
- 24-25-Interstate Capacity Hearings
- 26-Committees

July

- 1-Administrative Session
- 10-Committees
- 15-Administrative Session
- 31-Committees

NARUC

Summer Meeting

July 27-30, 2003
Denver, Colorado

Annual Convention

November 10-13, 2003
Atlanta, Georgia

Winter Meeting

February 21-24, 2004
Washington, D.C.

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