



CITY OF SANTA FE UTILITY BILLING ADMINISTRATIVE MANUAL

SUBJECT

Dispute Resolution Policy & Procedure	Policy Number 2.0.0	# Pages .6
	Effective Date 07-01-2003	Revision Date 00-00-0000

1.0 PURPOSE:

1.1 To define the method for the proper handling of customer complaints and disputes.

2.0 APPLICABLE TO:

2.1 All Utility Billing, City Hall Customer Service, Solid Waste Customer Service and Wastewater Customer Service employees.

3.0 REFERENCES:

3.1 Leak Adjustment Policy, Unknown Cause Adjustment Policy, Low Income Credit Policy, Vacancy Credit Policy, City Code Chapter 21 – Refuse, City Code Chapter 22 – Sewer, City Code Chapter 25 – Water, City Code Chapter 15 – Utility Billing (Future), Payment Arrangement Policy, Complaint Resolution Script.

4.0 DEFINITIONS:

4.1 Adjustments:

4.1.1 Leak Adjustment: Credit given to an account when a customer can substantiate that high water usage reported and billed was due to a leak.

4.1.2 Unknown Cause Adjustment: Credit given to an account when a customer cannot provide a reason for a high water usage reported and billed.

4.2 Credits:

4.2.1 Low Income Credit: Credit given when the customer's gross annual income does not exceed one hundred twenty percent (120%) of the most recently established federal poverty income level as defined by the U.S. Department of Labor

4.2.2 Vacancy Credit: Credit given to an account when the customer can demonstrate that the residence will be vacant for the upcoming three month period.

4.3 Data Logging (future): The capability of a device attached to a water meter to record

data such as dates and times of water usage, maximum and minimum water usage and leak detection information.

- 4.4 Downsized Meter: The replacement of a meter of a given size to a meter of a smaller size.
- 4.5 Meter Flow Leak Detection Test: A test performed by a meter reader where the customer turns off all water-using devices inside and outside of the residence or building and the meter reader watches the meter to see if any flow is being registered.
- 4.6 Meter Testing: Removal of a water meter to test the accuracy of its high, medium and low flows.
- 4.7 Release of Liability: Assigning the legal liability and responsibility of payments for refuse, sewer and water bills from a property owner to a tenant.
- 4.8 Water Conservation Audit: An inspection provided by Water Conservation which assists a customer in the more efficient use of water.

5.0 POLICY:

- 5.1 To provide for a method of effective and complete customer dispute resolution.

6.0 PROCEDURES:

- 6.1 All customer complaints and disputes are to be directed to a Customer Service Representative (CSR) for initial evaluation and resolution.
- 6.2 **For All Complaints:**
 - 6.2.1 Check the online notes for any previous customer contact and information.
 - 6.2.2 Check the paper files for any previous customer contact and information.
 - 6.2.3 If the issue deals with landlord / tenant billing, inform the customer of the Release of Liability policy and send the required forms and instructions to the customer.
 - 6.2.4 If the customer is having difficulty paying the bill:
 - 6.2.4.1 Advise the customer of the Low Income policy.
 - 6.2.4.2 Advise the customer of the Payment Arrangement policy.
 - 6.2.5 If the customer indicates that the residence is vacant, advise them of the Vacancy Credit policy (valid only for residential customers).

6.3 For Water Complaints: The assigned CSR is to use the following tools (as appropriate) to reach a satisfactory resolution to the customer's issue:

6.3.1 Investigate the situation. Ask questions such as:

- Have they had houseguests?
 - Holidays
- Do they have:
 - Teenagers?
 - Children normally away from home who've returned?
 - Changes in family size?
- Do they have an irrigation system?
- Have they checked for toilet leaks? Advise them that the toilet may have a "silent" leak.
- Have they checked interior and exterior faucets?
- Do they have radiant heating?
- Have they had a plumber inspect for leaks?
- Do they have a water softener?
- Do they have a hot tub or swimming pool?
- Do that have a man-made pond or fountain?

6.3.2 Submit a work order to have the meter re-read.

6.3.3 Submit a work order to have a meter reader meet with customer and perform a meter flow leak detection test.

6.3.4 Submit a work order to have the meter tested and, if judged to be faulty, replaced.

6.3.4.1 Advise the customer that they may be present for the meter test.

6.3.5 Schedule a Water Conservation Audit for the property.

6.3.5.1 Advise the customer that the water auditor will search for visible leaks, may replace shower heads or faucet aerators with more efficient devices, will perform a leak test of all toilets and will test any irrigation systems.

6.3.6 If a leak has been found, advise the customer that they may apply for a One-Time Only Leak Credit and send the required forms and instructions to the customer.

6.3.6.1 If we are reading consumption and the customer is convinced that they do not have a leak, advise the customer that they may wish to hire a leak detection company to search for leaks. Do not make a recommendation as to which company to hire – advise them to look in the phone book.

6.3.7 If no explanation for high water consumption can be found, advise the customer that they may apply for a One-Time Only Credit for Unknown Cause and send the required forms and instructions to the customer.

6.3.7.1 If consumption is read and the customer is convinced that they do not have a leak, advise the customer that they may wish to hire a leak detection company to search for leaks. Do not make a recommendation as to which company to hire – advise them to look in the phone book.

6.3.8 The customer will be advised of the action taken by the CSR.

6.3.9 If no successful resolution can be achieved, turn the complaint over to an Account Specialist, Customer Service Manager or Billing Supervisor for additional review. The customer will be advised that the complaint has been assigned to an Account Specialist or Supervisor.

6.4 For Solid Waste Complaints:

6.4.1 All solid waste service complaints are to be forwarded to the Solid Waste Division for initial resolution. If resolution of the complaint is unsatisfactory to the customer, the complaint should be forwarded to the Utility Billing Division Director for review and resolution.

6.4.2 All billing complaints related to Solid Waste are to be addressed by Water Customer Service.

6.4.3 The only billing complaint to be forwarded to Solid Waste is a request for a credit for solid waste services. Solid Waste will be responsible for evaluating the credit request and submitting the adjustment.

6.5 For Wastewater Complaints:

6.5.1 Water customer service representatives are authorized to make sewer consumption reassessments based on actual consumption or other factors presented by the customer that may reduce the customer's sewer assessment.

6.5.2 All wastewater service and COD complaints are to be forwarded to the Wastewater Division for initial resolution. If resolution of the complaint is unsatisfactory to the customer, the complaint should be forwarded to the Utility Billing Division Director for review and resolution.

6.6 Account Specialist, Customer Service or Billing Supervisor Review

6.6.1 Ensure that all steps listed above were performed as required.

6.6.2 All current and past account data is to be thoroughly reviewed for errors and/or inconsistencies. This is to include review of information secured from PNM's TRES and MAS90 systems, and the city's Refuse & Sewer and JD Edwards billing systems.

6.6.3 If required, the Account Specialist will meet with the customer at their residence

or place of business to discuss the issue.

- 6.6.3.1 The Account Specialist will ask a co-worker to accompany him/her to serve as a witness and to assist in the investigation. The co-worker will be another Account Specialist or a Customer Service Representative who has knowledge of the account. The co-worker's supervisor must approve each request.
- 6.6.4 The Account Specialist will compile the results of the investigation and file a written Report of Findings and a Recommendation of Resolution with the Utility Billing Division Director.
- 6.6.5 If the complaint or dispute is given to the Customer Service Manager or Billing Supervisor, they will complete steps 6.6.1. and 6.6.2. The Customer Service Manager or Billing Supervisor has the authority to approve adjustments recommended by CSR's and Account Specialists. The customer will be advised of the decision of the Customer Service Manager or Billing Supervisor.
- 6.6.6 If an agreeable resolution is not reached with the customer, the customer is to be advised of the appeals procedure. The account will be turned over to the Utility Billing Division Director for review and resolution.
- 6.7 The Utility Billing Division Director will review the account in its entirety. The customer will be contacted as needed. The Utility Billing Division Director will inform the customer of the results of his/her investigation and will authorize appropriate adjustments. If the customer is not satisfied with the findings, the Utility Billing Division Director will inform the customer of the remaining steps of the appeals process.
- 6.8 All employees involved in the dispute will accurately and in a timely fashion document, in writing, all contacts with the customer (including date, time and location, what was said by both parties, what the promised actions were and what rules, regulations, forms or other documentation, either in writing or orally, were presented to the customer).

7.0 APPENDIXES:

- 7.1 None.

8.0 REVIEW AND APPROVALS:

8.1 REVIEWED BY: David B. Schmiedicke 7-16-03
Dave Schmiedicke, Utility Billing Division Director DATE

8.3 REVIEWED BY: Kathryn Raveling 7/16/03
Kathryn Raveling, Finance Director DATE

8.4 APPROVED BY: Jim Romero 7/16/03
Jim Romero, City Manager DATE

Complaint Resolution Script

DEALING WITH DIFFICULT CUSTOMERS

However well we do, there are occasions when our customers and we fail to work together well and equally. Despite this difficulty, the City of Santa Fe Finance and Utility Departments want to listen to the views of those people who use our services and to respond quickly and efficiently to put matters right when problems arise. Most people are not difficult by nature. They are under stress and may not be able to deal with it in any other way. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about:

- The standard of service
- The actions, or
- The lack of action

by the departments or their staff, affecting an individual or group of service users.

It is not:

- A first request for action or a service
- A first request for information or explanation

You can deal with people's difficult behavior more effectively if you:

- Try to take the heat out of the situation by listening attentively without interrupting, establishing exactly what the problem is, then offering positive advice.
- Do not take it personally! Even if the service user seems to be taking out their frustration on you, the issue will often be about the wider service, or perhaps the difficulties they are trying to address.
- Find a solution and focus on the future rather than on what went wrong.
- Apologize on behalf of the City of Santa Fe if you think a mistake has been made.
- Ask them if they want to make a formal, written complaint. This can make them feel that something positive is being done.

- Look for reasonable people in unreasonable situations.

We have promised the public that when they complain we will:

- Acknowledge a written complaint within 2 working days.
- Provide a full response within 28 days or three months in exceptional circumstances.

Good practice points to remember when a complaint is received:

Make every effort to resolve the problem yourself. If your solution does not satisfy the customer, pass the complaint to the relevant service manager, making a note of all the complaint details and the desired outcome. Stay with the customer while talking to the supervisor. Use this as an opportunity to learn!

Ensure that the complainant knows what you have done, when they may expect to receive a response and from whom. It is helpful at this stage, to give the complainant information about the complaints and dispute resolution procedure. If the complainant is clearly dissatisfied, ensure that the complaint is passed to the Customer Service Manager.

You are responsible for dealing with the complaint. Use the following guidelines:

- Acknowledge all written complaints in writing within 2 working days.
- Say who is going to be dealing with the complaint: this should be a named individual that the complainant can contact at any time if they have any queries about the department's progress in dealing with their complaint.
- Say how long it will be before they receive your reply.
- Locate anyone else responsible for dealing with the complaint so that it does not get delayed.
- Inform the complainant of progress, particularly if there are likely to be delays. They do not know what is happening while you are working on their problem. Do not wait for them to have to contact you.
- Inform them of the final outcome of the complaint. Let them know what they can do if they are still unhappy with the action taken or the explanation given.
- If they are not happy with the way in which the complaint has been dealt with so far, inform them of their right to take their complaint to the Customer Service Manager.

- Make notations on the account in the Customer Information System. Record the following information:
 - Who worked on the resolution of the complaint,
 - Note each contact with the customer (in-person visit, phone conversations, mail and e-mail),
 - Note dates, times and places of meetings.
 - What was said by both parties,
 - What the promised actions were, and,
 - What rules, regulations, forms or other documentation, either orally or in writing, were presented to the customer.

Five good reasons to be positive about complaints:

1. Complaints give us the opportunity to put right something that may have gone wrong.
2. People have a right to complain, and it is our job to help them exercise that right.
3. Customer Satisfaction – it provides the opportunity to turn dissatisfied customers into satisfied customers.
4. Improving Services – the more we can find out about what people do not like about our services, the more we can do to put it right.
5. It is a learning process. It helps us see our operations through the customer's eyes and allows us to learn from our own mistakes!

