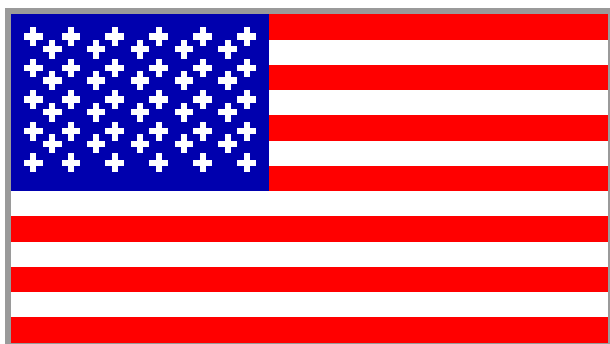
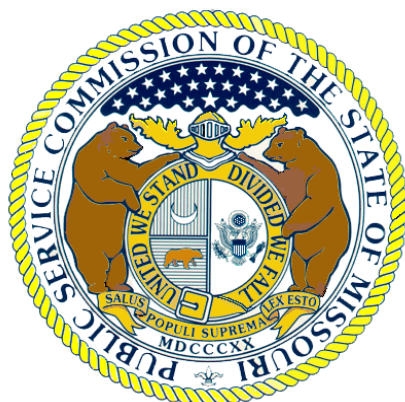


Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Agency (RURA), National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC) and Missouri Public Service Commission (MPSC)

Regulatory Partnership Program



Sponsored by US Agency for International Development (USAID)

RURA and NARUC Partnership

Friday, October 29th, 11:15 to 12:45

Warren Wood

**Consumer Input Into the
Regulatory Decision Making
Process – The Public Hearing
Process**

Consumer Input Into the Regulatory Process

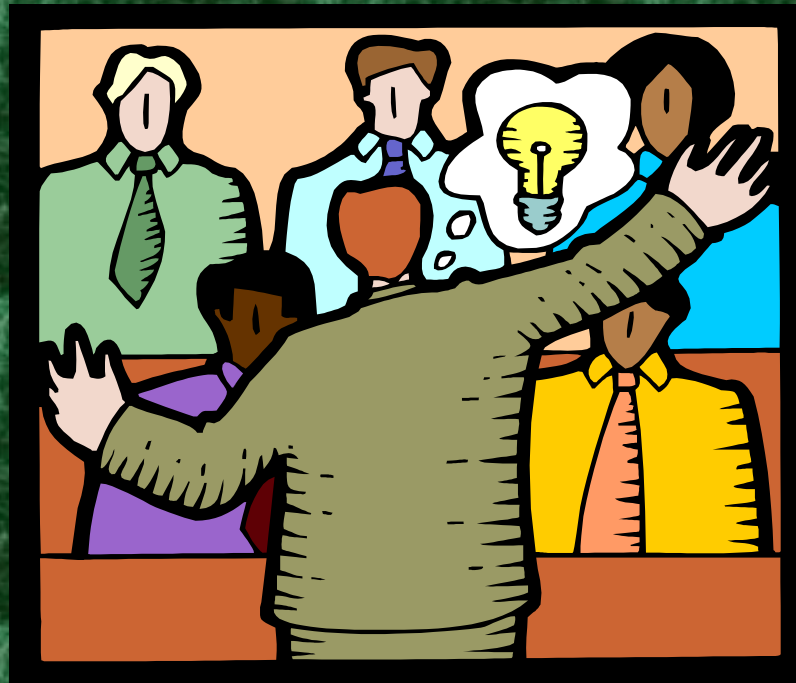
The Commission strives to assure that all interested parties to issues being considered by the Commission are aware of these proceedings and how the parties will be impacted.

Consumer Input Into the Regulatory Process

Missouri has an “Office of the Public Counsel” (OPC). This agency is charged with representing residential and small commercial customers in regulatory proceedings before the Commission. Decisions by our Commission are sometimes appealed by the OPC.

Consumer Input Into the Regulatory Process

Commission proceedings that often draw a great deal of interest from consumers include rate cases, rulemaking cases, and general policy reviews.



Consumer Input Into the Regulatory Process

After a rate case has been filed, the Commission requires that public hearings be held in the areas of the utility's service territory that would be impacted by the rate case decision. The Commission strives to arrange these public hearings in easy to access locations and at convenient times.

Consumer Input Into the Regulatory Process

All of the customers of the utility requesting a rate increase are notified of the proposed rate increase and the public hearing locations, dates and times through notifications in their bill. The Commission also issues press releases to notify the media.

Consumer Input Into the Regulatory Process

At rate case public hearings the Staff starts the meeting by handing out informational sheets that detail the major aspects of the company's case. The Staff then presents information on how public hearings proceed. After this explanation, questions are asked by those in attendance and the Staff and other parties in attendance answer the questions as best they can.

Consumer Input Into the Regulatory Process

The informational sheets that the Staff shares with those in attendance typically detail how much of an increase the utility is requesting, how that increase could impact the average customer, any surcharges that are being requested, and any other significant aspects of the rate case.

Consumer Input Into the Regulatory Process

This informational session typically starts ½ hour before the actual public hearing with the Commissioner and judge in attendance. The Commissioner and judge cannot attend this portion of the hearing since the questions and answers provided would be considered an ex-parte contact.

Consumer Input Into the Regulatory Process

Once the Commissioner and judge start the public hearing portion of the meeting, no more questions may be answered that relate to the case.

Consumer Input Into the Regulatory Process

Witnesses are sworn in and testify to any aspects of the rate case they wish to comment on.

Witnesses often testify on the hardship the rate increase would cause and on customer service problems. All comments are recorded in a transcript that is placed in the case file for review by interested parties.

Consumer Input Into the Regulatory Process

Rulemaking cases and general policy reviews are two of the other types of Commission proceedings that often draw a high level of consumer interest.

Consumer Input Into the Regulatory Process

An example of a recent rulemaking preceding that drew a lot of interest related to changes the Commission was making to our “Cold Weather Rule”. This rule governs disconnection, reconnection, and customer deposit and payment agreement requirements for utilities that provide heating service to customers during the winter.

Consumer Input Into the Regulatory Process

An example of a recent general policy review that drew a lot of interest related to natural gas commodity prices. Natural gas prices had spiked dramatically and many customers had experienced winter bill increases in excess of 100%. Many customers were asking if our utilities were doing all they could to control natural gas price spikes to their customers.

Consumer Input Into the Regulatory Process

In response to these types of rulemaking and general policy review proceedings, the Commission often opens an investigatory docket or a working docket. Sometimes these working dockets are associated with creation of a task force.

Consumer Input Into the Regulatory Process

When a task force is created the individuals assigned to it are chosen by the Commission based on their expertise in the area being addressed. Efforts are made to assign members to the task force with differing positions so that the group will be “balanced” – not be overly utility or consumer oriented.

Consumer Input Into the Regulatory Process

If a task force is created or not, the Commission will typically, in the order opening the docket, outline what the issues are and invite any interested parties to intervene and participate.

The group of interested parties will then set up a meeting schedule to discuss the issues and hold meetings over a period of weeks or months.

Consumer Input Into the Regulatory Process

These discussions may result in a report on the issue for the Commission's information, a stipulation and agreement between the parties, a proposed rule that the parties agree to, or a motion to open another type of docket for purposes of litigating the issues that were not resolved between the parties.

Consumer Input Into the Regulatory Process

The Commission also receives a lot of attention from consumers when natural gas prices spike, telecommunication rules at the federal level change, when a community has quality of water service problems, or when a significant number of customers are impacted by a major electric outage.



Consumer Input Into the Regulatory Process

If some type of docket or task force is not created to address these issues, customers still have the ability to provide their comments and complaints to the Commission and its Staff.

Consumer Input Into the Regulatory Process

The Commission has a consumer services number that is toll free to call from anywhere in the US. Our consumer services department receives numerous calls from customers every day and is often able to help the customer in resolving their difficulties with the utility.

Consumer Input Into the Regulatory Process

Informal complaints, formal complaints, public comments, and phone calls are usually entered into our Electronic Filing and Information System (EFIS). This provides a convenient means to track these activities and assign them to Staff for follow-up and resolution.

Consumer Input Into the Regulatory Process

In addition to Commission dockets, task forces and consumer services representatives, consumers can access a great deal of information on our website. Our public information and education group has prepared many information sheets on the aspects of our regulatory functions that impact customers.

Questions?

