

# Telephone customers gain consumers' bill of rights

Friday the 13th of May was a good day for telephone customers, according to the Michigan Public Service Commission.

That's when all 53 telephone companies in Michigan formally began operating under the terms of the commission's "Customer Bill of Rights," the consumer standards and billing practices for residential telephone service.

The first comprehensive revision of residential telephone standards since 1944, the rules are similar to those adopted by the commission in 1975 for residential gas and electric service.

The standards govern customer-utility rights and responsibilities in the payment of bills, security deposits, complaint procedures, discontinuation of service and hearing procedures.

A feature of the telephone bill of rights is that companies must allow customers who have ordered new service or changed service to cancel or reduce their order, without a service charge, within 30 days of receiving a bill for such service. Companies also must send an itemized statement within 10 days of completing an order for new service or a significant change in service, as well as a pamphlet listing general residential services available.

The companies are to print the new rules in their directories, to include an announcement in customers' monthly bills, and to prepare a limited edition of a pamphlet describing the standards in more detail. The pamphlet will be given to new customers and sent on request to current customers.

The commission said the telephone rules provide for:

- 21 days for payment of bills and elimination of late payment charges and discounts.
- Elimination of deposits for new and continued service except when the customer's unsatisfactory credit standing has been established.

- Complaint and hearing procedures, including settlement agreements, to insure due process rights for all Michigan residential telephone customers.

- Hiring of hearing examiners who are not otherwise employed by the telephone utility to conduct hearings on billing and service complaints.
- Delaying discontinuation of telephone service when a medical emergency exists.

- The rules also will:
- Allow a company to demand payment sooner than 21 days if a customer

has had service discontinued within the last 12 months and thereafter runs up a large toll bill.

- Allow telephone companies to use a customer's unpaid past due bill in another state as a basis for requesting a deposit.

- Limit the amount that a guarantor of a customer's service can be liable for to \$100.
- Permit a telephone utility to waive

the usual requirement that a customer should pay 50 per cent of the amount not in dispute before a hearing is held on the dispute.

The commission said that, subject to the requirements of the rules, companies will be allowed to discontinue residential service to a customer for any of the following reasons:

- Not paying a delinquent account;
- Failing to post a cash security de-

posit or other guarantee if it is required under the rules;

- Interfering with or using telephone service when not authorized to do so;

- Failing to meet the terms of a settlement agreement with the company;
- Refusing to give the company access to its equipment at reasonable times for inspection, maintenance or replacement;

- Using a false name or otherwise misrepresenting identity in order to obtain telephone service;
- Using a party line improperly, including interfering with the rights of other party line customers to a fair share of the service;
- Violating any other company rules that the commission has approved, in a way that affects customer safety or the integrity of the telephone equipment.

## Kuhn seeks new sewer authority

George W. Kuhn, Oakland County drain commissioner, has proposed that a new regional sewer authority be created to manage the Jefferson Treatment Plant, charging "institutional deficiencies of the present structure."

Kuhn, a West Bloomfield Township resident, said, "Plainly and simply for the management and functional operation of the Jefferson Treatment Plant by the city of Detroit has been and continues to be deficient."

The Oakland County drain commissioner proposed that a "Southeastern Michigan Wastewater Treatment Au-

thority" be created. He explained that the authority would be controlled by a governing board representing each customer municipality on a one-person, one-vote basis. Each municipality's governing body would appoint its representative to this regional board.

Kuhn cited recent testimony before the Detroit city council as support for his proposal. George Alexander, regional administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency for this region, said the operation of the plant was completely unsatisfactory, according to the Oakland County drain commissioner.

Kuhn also said the director of the Detroit Water and Sewage Department testified the Jefferson Plant was operating at only 50 to 60 per cent of present capacity.

"The time has come to acknowledge that a complete revision of the present structure is needed. The solution needed is necessarily a legislative one," Kuhn said.

He explained that his proposed authority would have no taxing authority. Instead, it would be supported by "user charges" based on the actual cost of providing treatment service to each municipality. He added the au-

thority would not earn a profit or a rate of return of any kind on its operation.

Kuhn pointed out that "the present utility is not supported by the City of Detroit or city general funds." The entire asset pool is revenue based, he said.

"The funds of the utility are now, and have always been based exclusively on user charges paid by customers of the system." This charge is paid "regardless of residence, whether in the City of Detroit or outside," he said.

## Regional Roundup

### ART THEFT PROBED

Detroit Police are continuing their investigation into the art thefts at the Detroit Institute of Art. Farmington Hills resident Norman Goodman was arraigned this week on charges of receiving and possessing stolen property. Museum officials estimate that \$100,000 worth of art objects were stolen over a five-year period from the museum.

### SOUTHFIELD RECALL

A movement is afoot in Southfield to recall three councilmen and defeat two others at the polls next August. The movement came about in response to the recent council approval of a controversial low to moderate income housing project.

A group of homeowners say they want to recall council president Martin Hollander and council members Jean McDonnell and Lillian Jaffe. In addition, the group hopes to stop councilman Stephen Cooper in his bid for re-election and defeat councilman John Marosky in his race for mayor.

### EMS PLANS UNDERWAY

Final preparations are underway in Bloomfield Township for the launching of an emergency medical service (EMS) advanced life support system.

Officials caution residents, however, that the service will not be operational until July. In the meantime, most of the necessary equipment has been delivered and test runs are scheduled to begin in June.

Twelve township firefighters who have been enrolled in advanced emergency medical technician classes at Oakland Community College since September, are scheduled to undergo state certification testing next month.

### ULTIMATUM

Two couples who own a marsh on Walnut Lake in West Bloomfield say they will turn the 5.5 acres over to the DNR for a public launch site if the DNR changes its mind on a ruling.

The DNR ruled that the couples can partially fill the swampland in order to build three homes for sale.

A group of neighboring lakefront homeowners, however, have appealed that ruling. The homeowners now say it's up to the protesters whether they want public access to their lake or the three new homes.

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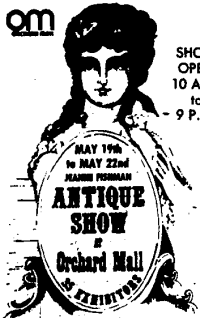
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