



LETTER NO. L-31-00

ROBERT J. PELLATT
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VIA FACSIMILE

July 6, 2000

Mr. David M. Masuhara
Vice President
Legal, Regulatory and Logistics
BC Gas Utility Ltd.
24th Floor, 1111 West Georgia Street
Vancouver, B.C. V6E 4M4

Mr. Ray Aldeguer
Senior Vice President
Legal and Regulatory Affairs and General Counsel
British Columbia Hydro and Power Authority
17th Floor, 333 Dunsmuir Street
Vancouver, B.C. V6B 5R3

Dear Messrs. Masuhara and Aldeguer:

Re: Estimated Meter Readings on Final Bills

The Commission received a complaint from Mr. J. Meindersma, attached, concerning a final bill from BC Gas based on an estimated meter reading. Prior to moving from his Enderby residence, the customer advised BC Gas of the timing of the move and asked for a final bill based on an actual meter reading. BC Gas' customer service centre subsequently advised that an estimated meter reading for a final bill was standard practice and that an actual meter reading would not be undertaken by BC Gas staff. On vacating his residence Mr. Meindersma read his meter and reported the reading to BC Gas staff. BC Gas issued a bill based on an estimate, which was higher than the actual meter reading. The Commission reviewed the complaint and information from other utilities and has ruled that BC Gas should base Mr. Meindersma's final bill on the actual meter reading taken by the customer on March 31, 2000.

The Commission has reviewed the practices of regulated energy utilities such as B.C. Hydro, BC Gas, Centra Gas, Pacific Northern Gas, and West Kootenay Power. A summary table outlining the billing practices followed for issuing a final bill is attached.

On the matter of final bills to customers based on actual meter readings vs. estimated readings generated by the billing program, we ask BC Gas and B.C. Hydro to provide the Commission with a short report on estimated vs. actual meter readings for final bills and to cover, at a minimum, the following information:

- How confident is the utility in using a final estimated meter reading, where it affects not only the customer leaving the residence but also the new customer coming in to the location?
- What financial and staffing impact, if any, would the utility incur if final bills were required to be based on actual meter readings taken by utility personnel?
- What would be the costs and risks of allowing customers who wish to read their own meters the option to provide the information to the utilities?

We ask BC Gas and B.C. Hydro to provide the Commission with a report by September 30, 2000.

Yours truly,

Original signed by:

Robert J. Pellatt

RJP/yl
Enclosures