



GPSC News



Making Business and Safety Decisions Affecting Tomorrow

Fall 2003

Volume 3 Issue 2

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Consumer Preparedness Meeting Sets Tone for Winter

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Representatives from natural gas marketers, Commission staff, other state agencies and community groups participated in the Commission-sponsored 2003-04 Consumer Winter Preparedness Meeting on October 21 to prepare common messages to consumers in the face of possible higher natural gas prices this winter. Participants heard first from Commissioner David Burgess who said it was important to present a unified front in communicating with consumers this winter. Among the topics



Commissioner David Burgess addresses the Winter Preparedness meeting

discussed were the following areas: Volatile Natural Gas Prices; Energy Conservation; Disconnection Rules and Policies; Payment Options; Regulated Provider; and

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NARUC Convention Here

The NARUC 115th Annual Convention will be held here November 16-19, 2003 at the Atlanta Marriott Marquis. The Convention is designed to provide professional education and development, while offering networking opportunities with federal and state colleagues. The convention will commence



with introductory remarks by NARUC President and our own Commissioner

Stan Wise followed by the nomination speeches for the election of the NARUC offices of President, First Vice President and Second Vice President. Welcome remarks will be given by Commission Chairman Robert "Bobby" Baker, Jr. Fol-

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Energy America Plans To Leave Georgia



(from PR Newswire)

Energy America announced October 7 that it plans to exit the natural gas market in Georgia and has begun negotiations to sell its business to interested parties. The company will cooperate fully with the Georgia Public Service Commission to ensure an orderly transition. Once transition plans are finalized with the Commission, Energy America will communicate those plans to its customers. The company stated that its aim was to ensure that customers did not suffer any adverse consequences because of this decision. Energy America serves approximately 50,000 Georgia

natural gas customers in the deregulated Atlanta Gas Light market. The decision to exit Georgia was made in the context of a challenging business environment where it was proving difficult to achieve the necessary scale of operation to create real shareholder value. Energy America remains committed to deregulation and continues to be successful in the U.S., evaluating new markets, cross marketing energy with home services, and launching business

services. The company's strategy will continue to focus on markets where Energy America can maximize shareholder value by providing consumers with innovative products, and offering a wide range of choice and compelling value propositions in energy and energy services.

If you have a story for the next GPSC News, please send to Bill Edge, bille@psc.state.ga.us. Next issue deadline is January 15, 2004.



Consumer Meeting

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Assistance Programs.

Commissioner Burgess noted that industry analysts are predicting natural gas prices this winter could rise from 15% to 50%.

Commission economist John Cogburn pointed out that the days of \$2 per therm natural gas are probably gone. The natural gas staff explained various ways



John Cogburn makes a point about natural gas prices

consumers can save money on their natural gas bills by

insulating their homes, checking for leaks and taking advantage of budget billing and fixed rate plans. Joyce Hull with the Department of Human Resources outlined the various financial assistance programs available through her department. At the request of Commissioner Burgess, Natural Gas staff organized the meeting. The meeting received extensive coverage on WAGA-TV, the local Fox News affiliate.

NARUC

(Continued from page 1)

Following Monday's opening session there will be panel discussions on the Future of Energy, Electric Regulation, Ex-parte Communications, Base load Capacity, Broadband and DSL, Grid Reliability, and Ethical Challenges in Today's Regulatory Environment.

More than 1,500 people are ex-



Commissioner Stan Wise

pected to attend. The NARUC Convention will pump about \$1

million into the local economy.

Upcoming NARUC meetings are: March 7 - 10, 2004 (NARUC Winter Meeting), Washington DC.; July 11 - 14, 2004 (NARUC Summer Committee Meeting) Salt Lake City, Utah and November 14 - 17, 2004 (116th NARUC Annual Convention), Nashville, Tennessee.



Commission Staff Takes Part In Community Forums

Making a Difference in the Lives of Our Seniors By Bernard Cameron

Over the past three months, staff in Consumer Affairs has spread the message to senior citizens throughout metro Atlanta and in parts of Southeast Georgia that "educated consumers are better prepared to make informed choices regarding their natural gas services." More than 1200 seniors and community action employees have benefited from on-site workshops and Presentations given by Consumer Affairs staff members.

Participants have been educated on aspects of the billing and disconnect rules, how to read and understand their gas bills, senior citizen's discounts across all industries, fixed rate versus variable rate plans and budget billing. After receiving the Commission's educational package, one participant, Mrs. Jones at the DeKalb-Atlanta Senior Center in Kirkwood, said, "I guess I'll be going to school tonight."

In partnership with the Department of Human Resources and Rev. Henry A. Johnson (senior citizen advocate), we look forward to

BellSouth challenges Commission Ruling

BellSouth has filed a challenge to the Commission's June 24 decision lowering the Company's rates for interconnection access. The petition, filed in federal district court in Atlanta, calls the ruling illegal and unfair. BellSouth filed the legal action despite the Commission's reconsideration of its action which led to the adjustment of some rates. The Commission issued its original decision in this docket on March 24, 2003.

Changes in No Call Program A Win-Win for Consumers

The Commission August 15 announced that Georgia residential and wireless telephone customers can sign up at no cost for the Georgia list when they also register their phone numbers with the new Do Not Call lists maintained by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and the

Federal Trade Commission (FTC). There is no fee to register on the federal lists. Consumers can register with the federal lists online at www.donotcall.gov or by calling toll-free 1-888-382-1222. Georgia residential and wireless telephone customers will no longer have to pay the \$5 fee to be on the Georgia No

Call List. Registration on the federal list is for a five year period. The move will save about \$500,000 in this year's Commission budget. "This is a win-win situation for Georgia consumers," according to Commission Chairman Robert B. Baker, "we have found a way to save the taxpayers money while increasing our services to the consumer."

The Governor's Office of Consumers Affairs handles all violations reported by Georgia residents. Over 70 companies across the country have paid fines for violations of the No Call legislation in 13 states. Since becoming operational in 1999, the Georgia No Call List has dramatically limited the number of telemarketing calls that can be placed to the



**NATIONAL
DO NOT CALL
REGISTRY**

homes of individuals who have registered their objections to receiving these types of calls. Meanwhile, a federal appeals

court decision allowed the federal no call registry to continue signing up consumers. Telemarketer groups had filed challenges to the law and two federal courts had temporarily put the list on hold.

Commission Rulings



Commission Issues Decision in Georgia Power Fuel Case

The Commission on August 19 approved a stipulated agreement with Georgia Power on the Company's request for an increase in the Company's Fuel Cost Recovery Allowance. The Commission vote was 3-2 with Commissioners Robert B. Baker and Angela Speir voting no. The approved agreement allows the Company to recover \$157 million in under-collected fuel costs over an 18-month period beginning October 1, 2003. The agreement also provides for a seasonal fuel cost

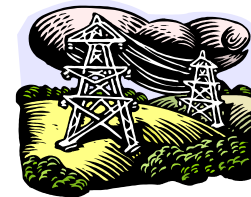
recovery rate that will lower residential customers' average bills from October through May while increasing the average bill from June through September. The average annual monthly increase for resi-



dential customers will be about 73 cents per month. Under Georgia Power's original proposal, residential customers would have paid \$18.96 more per year.

The approved agreement also

lowers the interest rate or carrying costs on any under or over recovery of fuel costs from the current 13 percent to one point five (1.5) percent beginning September 1, 2003. This decision will save customers 44 cents per month. Under Georgia law, the Company is allowed to recover dollar for dollar its costs for fuel used in the generation of electricity.



Commission Resolves Alleged Violations by Natural Gas Marketer

The Commission September 2 approved the largest assessment ever against a Georgia natural gas marketer in order to resolve 138 allegations of slamming against marketer Energy America. Slamming is the switching of a consumer's natural gas marketer without the consumer's authorization.

The Commission approved the stipulated agreement on a 3-2 vote with Commission Chairman Robert B. Baker, Jr. and Commissioner Angela Speir voting no. Commissioner Speir offered an amendment that would have increased the assessment to \$548,000 but a majority of the Commission failed to support her

amendment, which Chairman Baker did support.

The stipulation requires Energy America to contribute \$400,000 to the Low Income Heat Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) plus \$100 credits to each of the 138 customers slammed for a total payment of \$413,800. In addition, Energy America would pay \$5 to these customers for each day it took the gas marketer to return the customers to their preferred provider after being slammed.

Commissioners Testify Before Senate Study Committee

Commissioners and staff appeared before the Senate Electric Line Location Study Committee September 18 to offer the Commission perspective on legislation concerning the controversial issue of eminent domain. Commission Chair Robert B. Baker, and



Commissioners Angela Speir and Doug Everett told the Committee that the bills

would require additional financial and personnel resources for the Commission. The Study Committee will submit its recommendations on possible legislation before the 2004 General Assembly convenes in January.

Commission Rulings



Commission Approves MCI Complaint Against BellSouth Over DSL Service

The Commission on October 21 voted in favor of a MCI Worldcom Communications, Inc. (MCI) complaint against BellSouth Telecommunications, Inc. (BellSouth). The Commission vote was 3-2, with Commissioners Robert B. Baker, Jr. and Doug Everett voting no. In its complaint, MCI alleged that BellSouth is refusing to provide its digital subscriber line ("DSL") service to consumers who

sign up for MCI voice service. DSL service is provided over the high frequency portion of their telephone lines.

The Commission voted to accept a staff recommendation that found this practice violates both state law and the parties' interconnection agreements. Commissioner David Burgess said, "Consumers want these services. It is appropriate that the Commission adopt this policy."

The Commission also accepted an amendment by Commissioner Stan Wise that calls for the Commission to review this decision within 30 months. During that time, the Commission will determine what progress Competitive Local Exchange Companies have made in implementing their own DSL offerings.



Commission Program Protects Public Safety

The Commission's enforcement of a law that protects lives and property has resulted in more than a 30 percent reduction in utility disruption in the state over the past three years since lawmakers approved tough new changes in the utility facility protection laws. Georgia's "Call Before You Dig" law requires contractors,

builders and property owners to locate pipelines, cables and other underground utilities before excavating with mechanized equipment. A free service, offered through the Georgia Utilities Protection Center (UPC), protects the vast underground infrastructure of pipelines, conduits and cables that are critical to Georgia businesses and residences. According to Commission Chairman Robert Baker, Jr., "Disruption of these utili-

ties affects public safety, the environment and local economies." Beginning July 1, 2000, changes in the law gave the Commission new powers of enforcement with fines of up to \$10,000 per violation. Since enforcement of the program began, Atlanta Gas Light Company, BellSouth and Georgia Power have seen a joint reduction in damages to their pipelines and underground cables of 31.2 percent. Overall, damages have declined by a total of 4,000 incidents per year.

"The Commission is very pleased at the cooperation we have received from utilities such as Atlanta Gas Light, BellSouth and Georgia Power to reduce these damages to the utility infrastructure," said Danny McGriff, Manger of Pipeline/Facilities Safety for the Commission. "We have worked closely with them to educate the public about the importance of calling before cranking up a backhoe.

The reduction in damages has resulted in significant savings in terms of lost time and productivity while protecting public safety."

The Commission and the UPC have worked closely with the utilities to educate the public, particularly developers and excavators, via free "Call Before You Dig" safety seminars, brochures, posters and other literature.

Over \$1,153,750 has been levied in fines, of which \$179,750 has gone to the State Treasury with the remainder mitigated by training. While many violators pay fines, educating violators through Commission-approved training remains the central goal of Commission enforcement efforts.



Commission Team Takes Part in Promina Walk/Run

By Julia Truss

For the third consecutive year, the Commission was represented well by a courageous group of competitors at the PROMINA Corporate Run/Walk. The event promotes fitness and fellowship among employees of metro area business organizations and raises money to help support the Atlanta Braves Foundation and the Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Atlanta. It provides an excellent opportunity for colleagues and friends to encourage and compete with



The "Regulators" gather before race time

each other as runners or walkers along a 3.2 mile route beginning at Turner Field. Many employers

make it a company picnic of sorts by renting tents and providing food for after-the-race fun and activities. In addition to awarding prizes to top finishers, PROMINA also awards the PROMINA Cup to companies in recognition of their commitment to employee health and fitness.

This year's event was held on September 18 with 13 of the Commission's finest participating. Dan Cearfoss, who originally suggested GPSC participa-

tion, led the group of repeat entrants including Jamie Barber, Jim Bottone, Janey Chauvet, Ellen Harkins, Sheree Kernizan, Reece McAlister, Ann McCullough, Veronica Thomas, and Julia Truss. They happily welcomed first timers Philip Bedingfield, Tressa deAndrade, Brandon Marzo, Shaun Rosemond, and deLancey Todd.

Dan was the first place winner for the Commission runners, with Tressa coming in second.

Both Brandon and Sheree claimed victory for third place. Ann was this year's team captain and our fastest walker. Reese and Ellen ran the furthest, going well past the Baker Street turnaround point before heading back to Turner Field. In the end, all were winners and shared in a night of fun, with a few sore feet and muscles the following day, vowing to stay in shape and be better prepared for next year's race. The hope for next year is that

more staff members will join in the fun and that provisions for after-the-race food can be made. A tent with a catered meal would be real nice, or team members could bring various dishes for a tailgate party. In fact, that could be a way for even more staffers to participate, even those not interested in running or walking could come for the food and fellowship. Let's all think about that for next year!

Russian Official Gets Natural Gas Briefing

Natural Gas staff briefed Anatoly A. Lyutenko, the head of the Lotoshino District in Moscow on Georgia's natural gas industry during a visit to the Commission on October 6. Lyutenko's post is similar to that of a county manager or county executive. Lyutenko



Anatoly Lyutenko(center) listens to Michelle Thebert

told staff members that Russia's natural gas company, Gasprom, is about to embark on a major LNG project with the United States that could result in millions of dollars of Russian investment in the U.S. Lyutenko was accompanied by his interpreter. Tom Bond, Nancy Tyre and Michelle Thebert conducted the briefing.

Employee

Welcome New Employees



Victoria Taylor joined the Commission as an Analyst in the Natural Gas Section on October 1. She attended Saint Louis University and graduated with a B.S. in Finance and Marketing.



Greg Peacock joined the Commission as Director of Fiscal Affairs August 18. He previously worked for the Legislative Budget Office. He is a graduate of Augusta State University.

News



Joyce Johnson joined the Commission October 2 as a Consumer Affairs Customer Service Representative. She has more than 30 years experience in customer service with Atlanta Gas Light Company.



Desmond Smith joined Consumer Affairs on October 2. Desmond brings four years of customer service experience from The American Cancer Society.



Tonika Starks joined the Commission November 3 as a Telecom Analyst. She has an MBA from Devry University and a BS from the University of Southern Indiana. She is a native of Indiana.



Candace Roland joined the Commission November 3 as an Administrative Assistant for Commissioner Speir. She has a background in corporate recruiting and is a graduate of the University of Georgia.

Food Drive Underway

For the 6th year in a row, the Commission will be hosting its annual food drive through November 19, 2003. There will be two receptacles to collect the donated food - one in the Executive Secretary's office and one in the

break room on the 6th Floor - in which you can place your items.

Any donation of food that you can make will be most appreciated, particularly by those families whose upcoming holiday meals will consist of items that have been contributed by nice folks like you!

Congratulations to Reece McAlister, Commission Executive Secretary, on his marriage to **Ellen Harkins**. They were married October 4 in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. Many will remember Ellen when she served as Administrative Assistant to Commissioner Bob Durden.

Commission News

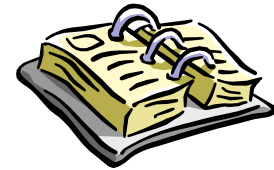


Georgia State Holidays For 2003

News Year's Day
Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday
Confederate Memorial Day
Memorial Day
Independence Day
Labor Day
Columbus Day
Veterans Day
Thanksgiving
Robert E. Lee Birthday
Christmas
President's Day

January 1
January 20
April 28
May 26
July 4
September 1
October 13
November 11
November 27
November 28
December 25
December 26

Commission Calendar



November

4-Administrative Session
 13-Committees
 20-Administrative Session
 25-Committees
 27-28-Thanksgiving Holiday

December

2-Administrative Session
 11-Committees
 16-Administrative Session
 25-26 -Christmas Holiday

Commission Calendar

January 2004

1-New Year's Day Holiday
 6-Administrative Session
 16-Committees
 19- M.L. King, Jr. Holiday
 20-Administrative Session
 30-Committees

February 2004

3-Administrative Session
 12- Committees
 19- Administrative Session

NARUC

Annual Convention

November 16-19, 2003
 Atlanta, Georgia

Winter Meeting

March 7-10, 2004
 Washington, D.C.

Summer Meeting

July 11-14, 2004
 Salt Lake City, Utah

GPSC ONLINE:

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COMMISSIONERS

Robert B. Baker, Jr., Chairman
David L. Burgess
H. Doug Everett
Angela E. Speir
Stan Wise

