



DISPUTED BILL APPEAL PROCESS

Riverside Public Utilities

City Council
June 14, 2022

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1

BACKGROUND

1. The RPU Disputed Bill Appeal Process Rules are adopted by the Board of Public Utilities and approved by City Council.
2. The approved processes for disputing Water bills is included in Water Rule 17; for Electric bills is included in Electric Rule 21, adopted by Board of Public Utilities on October 16, 2009, and approved by City Council on May 4, 2010.
3. On February 28, the Board of Public Utilities conducted a public hearing to consider changes to the rules and unanimously approved to recommend City Council adoption.



2

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2

DISCUSSION

1. The Public Utilities Customer Service Department is the first point of contact for any customer bill dispute.
2. Attempts to resolve customer disputes include having a meter re-read and having a meter tested for functionality.
3. If a customer disputes the bill, they have 10 days to be referred to the Disputed Bill Appeal Process and a series of investigative reviews take place, and a decision is communicated to the customer.
4. All customers are entitled to the bill dispute process.



3

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3

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE REQUESTED CHANGES

1. Allow customers multiple ways to contact RPU to dispute their utility bills.
2. Codify a commitment for staff to respond to billing disputes within 10 calendar days.
3. Combine two similar dispute processes into one to streamline the customer experience.
4. Update that the Board of Public Utilities is the final determination for administrative billing disputes.



4

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4

BILL DISPUTE PROCESS

Water Rule 17 and Electric Rule 21 Bill Dispute Appeal Section A



Customers who believe their utility bill is in error must first contact the Customer Service Division by telephone, in writing, ~~or~~ in person, by electronic mail, or on any Utility mobile or webpage form within ~~five~~ **ten** calendar days after receiving their bill **to dispute the bill.** ~~and initiate a complaint or request an investigation concerning the bill.~~ **Unless stated otherwise herein, the contact information is as follows: 3901 Orange Street, Riverside, CA 92501 or CallCenter@RiversideCa.gov, or (951) 782-0330.**



The Customer Service team will review summary information of the account and seek any potential matters that could be resolved by the corresponding Rules for Meter Investigations and Adjustments of Bills and advise the customer of the results.



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5

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5

BILL DISPUTE PROCESS

Water Rule 6 Meter Investigations and Adjustments of Bills Section A (partial):



1. Whenever the corrections of any bill for water service is questioned, the Utility shall investigate it. The Customer has **ten** calendar ~~five~~ days after receiving a bill to question its correctness **as described in Rule 21.** After that period the bill is considered payable as rendered.

Electric Rule 6 Meter Investigations and Adjustments of Bills Section A (partial):



1. Whenever the correctness of any bill for electric service is questioned, the Utility shall investigate it. The Customer has **ten** calendar ~~five~~ days after receiving the bill to question its correctness. After that period the bill is considered payable as rendered.



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6

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6

BILL DISPUTE PROCESS

Water Rule 6 & Electric Rule 6 Meter Investigations and Adjustments of Bills

1. These rules outline the established process for investigating customer concerns. The only requested change to align the number of days for a customer to start the process.
2. In 2018, the Board considered billing appeals from customers related to RPU billing issues. As a result of those hearings, changes to the rules were approved to:
 - a. Reduce the time periods used to calculate billing of undercharges for non-residential accounts from three years to six monthly billing periods,
 - b. Change the terminology of the time period used to calculate overcharges from one year to twelve monthly billing periods, and
 - c. Change the period used to calculate billing of overcharges for fast meters to be consistent with the monthly billing period for general overcharges.



7

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7

BILL DISPUTE PROCESS

Water Rule 17 and Electric Rule 21 Bill Dispute Appeal Section B



If, after contact with the Customer Service Division, the Customer believes the bill is still incorrect, the Customer must, within ten **calendar** days after receiving the explanation from the Customer Service Division, contact the Customer Service Manager, ~~Collections Supervisor,~~ or Customer Service Supervisor by ~~phone or send a written statement~~ **by telephone, in writing, in person, by electronic mail, or any Utility mobile or webpage form** regarding the **disputed bill**. ~~billing dispute to the Customer Service Manager, 3460 Orange Street, Riverside, CA 92501~~



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8

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8

BILL DISPUTE PROCESS

Water Rule 17 and Electric Rule 21 Bill Dispute Appeal Section C



A Review Manager will be designated to conduct an investigation of the Customer's billing dispute. The Review Manager will be the Customer Service Manager or Customer Service Supervisor, and the investigation may involve other staff at a higher level in the organization Utility. The investigation will include consideration of whether the Customer may amortize the unpaid balance over a reasonable period of time, not to exceed twelve months, but usually over a shorter time period. **The results of the investigation will be communicated to the Customer in writing within 10 calendar days.**



The Review Manager will conduct the investigation and send a letter to customer with the determination



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9

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9

BILL DISPUTE PROCESS

Water Rule 17 and Electric Rule 21 Bill Dispute Appeal Section D



If the disputed bill is not resolved, the Any Customer, ~~whose complaint or request for investigation regarding a bill for utility service results in an adverse determination by the Review Manager, may appeal such determination, after receiving the explanation from the Review Manager, by telephone, in writing, in person, by electronic mail, or on a Utility RPU mobile or webpage form~~ sending a written statement within 10 **calendar days following** ~~of mailing the results of the investigation. The appeal should state explanation setting forth~~ the reasons why the Customer believes the ~~bill investigation~~ is incorrect. The Customer must send this **appeal statement** to the Assistant General Manager, **Customer Service/Business Services Finance of Public Utilities, 3750 University Avenue, 5th floor, 3901 Orange Street, Riverside, CA 92501, or CallCenter@RiversideCa.gov, or (951) 782-0330**

Upon timely receipt of the written **appeal statement**, the **Director, or designee, Assistant General Manager, Finance of Public Utilities or his/her representative** will determine if the Review Manager's investigation was thorough and complete, addressing the aspects of the billing dispute. **The results of this determination will be communicated to the Customer in writing within 10 calendar days of receipt of the appeal.**



The GM or AGM will review the appeal and send a letter to customer with the determination



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10

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10

BILL DISPUTE PROCESS

Water Rule 17 Bill Dispute Appeal Section D & **Electric Rule 21** Bill Dispute Appeal Section E

- — If the billing dispute is not satisfactorily resolved with the Assistant
 - — General Manager, Finance of Public Utilities or his/her
 - — representative, the Customer may request a review by the Public
 - — Utilities Director by sending a written statement within five days of
- mailing the Assistant General Manager, Finance determination to:
Public Utilities Director, , 3901 Orange Street, Riverside, CA 92501.
Upon timely receipt of this written statement, the Public Utilities
Director will make his determination and communicate said
determination to the Customer in writing.

This step is proposed to be combined with Section D to expedite the Customer Experience.



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11

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11

BILL DISPUTE PROCESS

Water Rule 17 and Electric Rule 21 Bill Dispute Appeal Section ~~E~~ **F**

- — If the Customer is not satisfied with the **determination findings** of the
 - — ~~Public Utilities~~ Director, **or designee**, the Customer may appeal to
 - — the Board of Public Utilities. The appeal must be submitted **by**
 - — **either telephone, in writing, in person, by electronic mail, or any**
 - — **Utility mobile or webpage form** ~~in writing~~ to the ~~Public Utilities~~
- Director, as Secretary of the Board of Public Utilities, ~~together~~ with
the reasons for the dispute within ten **calendar** days following
mailing of the Public Utilities **Director's determination response**. In
the absence of a timely filed appeal, the **decision of the** Director's
~~determination~~ shall be final.



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12

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12

BILL DISPUTE PROCESS

Water Rule 17 and Electric Rule 21 Bill Dispute Appeal Section E F continued

- — Upon receipt of a timely appeal, **a hearing will be held** ~~the matter~~
- — ~~will be reviewed~~ by the Board of Public Utilities within 45 **calendar**
- — days of receipt. **The customer will receive notification of the hearing**
- — **date, time and location. The Board's decision will be made at the**
- public meeting and the customer will receive** ~~A a~~ written decision of
- the Board ~~of Public Utilities shall be delivered to the Customer by~~
- ~~personal delivery or~~ **by** certified mail within fifteen **calendar** days
- following the appeal hearing.



RPU staff will prepare all required notices to the Customer for the Board Hearing. The Board will review the appeal at a public meeting. RPU staff will send the customer the decision of the Board via certified mail.



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13

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13

BILL DISPUTE PROCESS

Water Rule 17 and Electric Rule 21 Bill Dispute Appeal Section E F continued

- — ~~The decision of the Board of Public Utilities is subject to appeal to the~~
- — ~~City Council pursuant to Section 10010 of the Public Utilities Code.~~
- — **"The City Council has designated the Board of Public Utilities as the**
- — **appropriate governing body to decide on the appeal pursuant to**
- Section 10010 of the Public Utilities Code. The determination of the**
- Board of Public Utilities will be the final decision."**



The City Attorney's Office will facilitate a Board training on the process for hearing a bill appeal at a future Board meeting.



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14

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14

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT



Strategic Priority No. 5 High Performing Government

Goal 5.3. to Enhance communication and collaboration with community members to improve transparency, build public trust, and encourage shared decision-making.

Cross-Cutting Threads



Community Trust



Fiscal Responsibility



Sustainability &
Resiliency



Equity



Innovation



15

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15

RECOMMENDATION

That the City Council adopt a resolution approving the changes to Water Rule 17, Electric Rule 21, Water Rule 6, and Electric Rule 6 as described herein.



16

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16