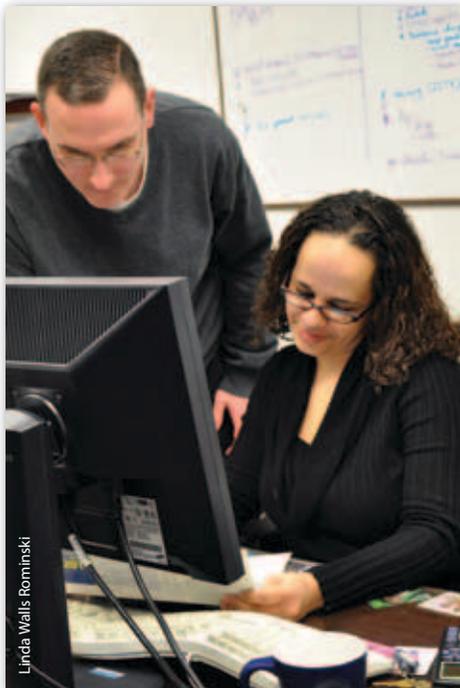


Consumer Services

Helping Ohio's residential utility customers Daily: OCC Consumer Services Division

Many of Ohio's residential utility customers continued to find 2010 financially challenging. According to the most recent data, an average 9.2 percent of Ohioans were unemployed, 15.2 percent were living in poverty and 85,483 homes were foreclosed during the year. The Consumer Services Division (CSD) of the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel offered valuable services to individuals seeking assistance and information about a variety of utility issues.

Research compiled by the CSD staff showed that as 2010 ended, one in 10 Ohio households experienced a disconnection of either their electric or natural gas services because of non-payment of a bill. The OCC's investigators worked with residential utility customers to address their



CSD Team Leader Matt Jones and Manager Maria Durban oversee the statewide residential customer services program.

A Frontier North customer called the OCC for assistance with an installation delay of his telephone service. The customer mentioned that he was in dire need of assistance because his wife was very ill and home alone. (OCC's investigator) contacted Frontier North and investigated the customer's concern. As a result, the customer's service was activated. The customer called back and thanked the OCC for solving his Frontier problem. The customer said he was impressed that a single call to the OCC solved a problem he had been having for a week.

Telephone customer experience

specific concerns and ensure they remained connected to essential services. CSD representatives negotiated with utility companies and customers resulting in restoring service and/or avoiding disconnections to more than 3,000 households.

The OCC's investigators are knowledgeable and highly skilled at understanding residential utility customer issues and provide professional, courteous individualized service. The OCC's toll-free hotline number 1-877-PICKOCC (1-877-742-5622) put thousands of Ohioans in touch with OCC services.

In addition to communicating with utility customers by telephone, the CSD staff responded to e-mails, letters and voice mail messages, as well as to those who walked into the OCC. The CSD also distributed educational materials to customers.

CSD staff also educated customers about their utility rights and responsibilities, as well as about available utility assistance and energy efficiency programs offered by American Electric Power, Columbia Gas of Ohio, FirstEnergy, Dominion East Ohio, Duke Energy Ohio and Vectren Energy Delivery of Ohio, among others.

The OCC's Consumer Services Division achieved significant benefits and protections for customers of several utilities, including choice-eligible natural gas customers.

Compliance analysts also filed direct testimony in the Ohio American Water (OAW) rate case (See Page 28). They identified and recommended several customer protections and changes associated with OAW's proposal to combine the billings of certain residential accounts and delays in the reconnection of services.

The OCC also advocated for more tenant protections with vacated rental properties and customer protections concerning co-responsible third parties.

The OCC's customer service representatives answered questions or provide information about:

- ▶ Specific utility questions, concerns or complaints, including billing disputes and meter reading problems;
- ▶ Billing and service changes resulting from company filings before the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio;
- ▶ Requirements for deposits and establishing, maintaining or discontinuing utility services;
- ▶ Payment assistance and low-income programs and options;
- ▶ Medical certification waivers;
- ▶ Company sales and marketing practices in the electric, natural gas and telephone companies;
- ▶ Energy efficiency and cost saving tips;
- ▶ Referrals to other local, state and federal organizations; and
- ▶ The OCC's free customer publications.

Janine,

Your staff successfully resolved my issue with AEP. Excellent work; excellent result ... Thanks.

*Jerry Tinianow
E-mail addressed to
Janine Migden-Ostrander*



Compliance Investigator Lisa Cain responds to a customer about FirstEnergy's all-electric rates.

Highlights of OCC achievements in consumer services during 2010

- ▶ During 2010, employees of the OCC Consumer Services Division (CSD) helped more than 3,000 Ohioans avoid or restore disconnected utility services.
- ▶ The majority of customer contacts to the OCC involved electric (45 percent) and natural gas (32 percent) issues.
- ▶ The CSD responded to more than 800 individual e-mail messages from customers inquiring about FirstEnergy's all-electric rate issues.
- ▶ In February 2010, the CSD saw a 276 percent increase in the total number of customer contacts received from February 2009. During this month, more than half of the calls to the CSD were related to the FirstEnergy all-electric rate discount issue.
- ▶ Early in 2010, the CSD received more than 300 calls from customers with questions and concerns about Columbus Gas of Ohio's changes to the way it billed for natural gas.