

**PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION**

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September 9, 2013

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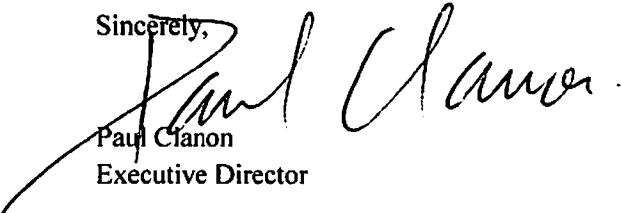
**Transmittal of Public Utilities Commission Report on Results of Review of Its Electronic Informal Complaint Filing Procedures**

In compliance with Section 311.4 of the California Public Utilities Code, please find enclosed the report to the Legislature on the results of the California Public Utilities Commission's (CPUC's) review of the procedures and technology involved in its electronic informal complaint filing procedures.

As detailed in the report, the CPUC's process and technology for filing complaints electronically continue to work effectively, with very few problems reported for consumers, the CPUC, or the utilities. The report also indicates that, as the CPUC's electronic complaint program has increased in efficiency and effectiveness, California consumers have become increasingly aware of and comfortable with the electronic complaint submission process.

Please contact me at (415) 703-3808 or [pac@cpuc.ca.gov](mailto:pac@cpuc.ca.gov) if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

  
Paul Chanon  
Executive Director

cc: Hon. Darrell Steinberg, President pro Tempore, California State Senate  
Hon. John Perez, Speaker, California State Assembly  
Hon. Alex Padilla, Chair, Senate Committee on Energy, Utilities & Communications  
Hon. Steven Bradford, Chair, Assembly Committee on Utilities & Commerce  
Mark Newton, Legislative Analyst's Office  
Kathy Madison, Department of Finance  
Sue Johnsrud, Governor Edmund O. Brown, Jr., Administrative Services

REPORT TO THE CALIFORNIA  
LEGISLATURE

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REVIEW OF  
ELECTRONIC INFORMAL COMPLAINT FILING  
PROCEDURES IN ACCORDANCE WITH CALIFORNIA  
PUBLIC UTILITIES CODE §311.4

**September 9, 2013**

**REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE ON  
CPUC ELECTRONIC INFORMAL COMPLAINT FILING**

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**I. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

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Senate Bill (SB) 531 (Stats. 1999, Ch. 327, Sec. 2 codified as Public Utilities (“P.U.”) Code §311.4), requires the California Public Utilities Commission (“CPUC”) to devise and implement a procedure that allows consumers to submit informal complaints regarding utility service by electronic means.<sup>1</sup> Section (c) of this statute requires that “the [CPUC] annually review the procedures and the technology involved to ensure the continued effectiveness of the program, and report any findings to the Legislature.” In compliance with these provisions, the purpose of the report herein is to provide the CPUC’s review of its electronic complaint submission process for the year 2012.

Informal complaints are received directly from utility customers and are processed by the Consumer Affairs Branch (“CAB”) within the CPUC. This is in contrast to formal complaints, which are docketed at the CPUC and processed by the Administrative Law Judge Division.

CAB receives complaints via telephone, U.S. Mail and electronically (via the Internet or email). The complaints that CAB receives via telephone, however, are not addressed in this report because they are resolved using a different process than complaints received via electronic means or U.S. Mail. For the remainder of this report the term “total complaints” will be used to mean any and all informal complaints submitted to CAB via U.S. Mail or via electronic means. “Electronic complaints” will be the term used for the subset of the “total complaints” submitted to CAB that comprise complaints received via the Internet or email.

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**II. REVIEW OF PROCEDURES AND TECHNOLOGY FOR THE FILING OF  
ELECTRONIC COMPLAINTS**

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In 1997, prior to the enactment of P.U. Code §311.4, the CPUC began accepting electronic submission of informal complaints via email. Beginning in 1999, the CPUC implemented systems to achieve the directives in §311.4, and began conducting an annual review of the technology, procedures, and effectiveness of its electronic complaint program. In 2003, the CPUC began to report the information required by §311.4 to the Legislature.

In compliance with paragraphs (a) and (b) of § 311.4, CAB developed and implemented a formal electronic complaint submission process, which first went live in January 2002. As part of this

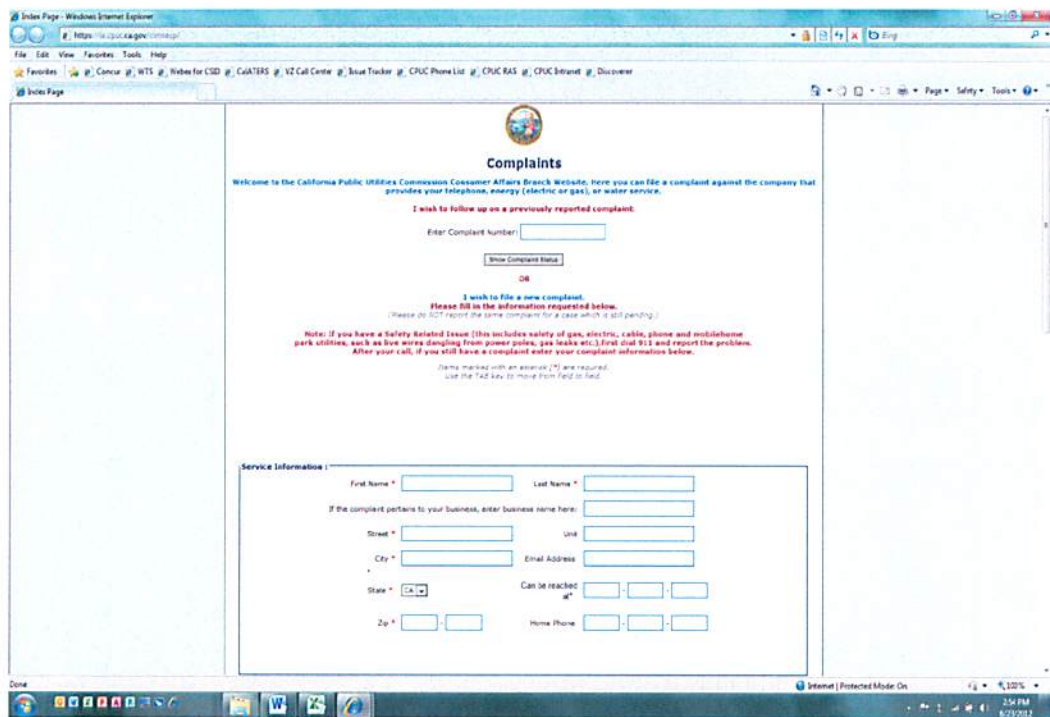
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<sup>1</sup> According to this Code section, “electronic means” includes e-mail, the Internet, or both.

effort, and in compliance with paragraph (h) of § 311.4, CAB implemented an Internet-based form that allowed consumers to submit informal complaint information. This complaint form is easily accessible to consumers on the CPUC’s website, is reviewed periodically, and is updated as necessary.<sup>2</sup> Initially, the information from this form was transmitted via email to an electronic mailbox, from which the data then had to be extracted by staff in order to create an actual complaint in the CPUC’s consumer complaint database.

With the introduction of a new database in November 2008, this process was further automated to allow the database to interface directly with the CPUC’s website, thus enabling staff to download consumer complaint information with the click of a button. The information is then reviewed by CAB staff, and appropriate action is taken to resolve the complaint with the utility. These changes have made the processing of Internet-based consumer complaints faster as well as more efficient and secure.

Figure 1. Snapshot of the Informal Complaint Portion of the CPUC’s Website



The CPUC’s new database is called the Consumer Information Management System (“CIMS”) database. CIMS was designed to interface directly with the electronic complaint information submitted via the CPUC’s website, thereby eliminating several processing steps. The benefits of

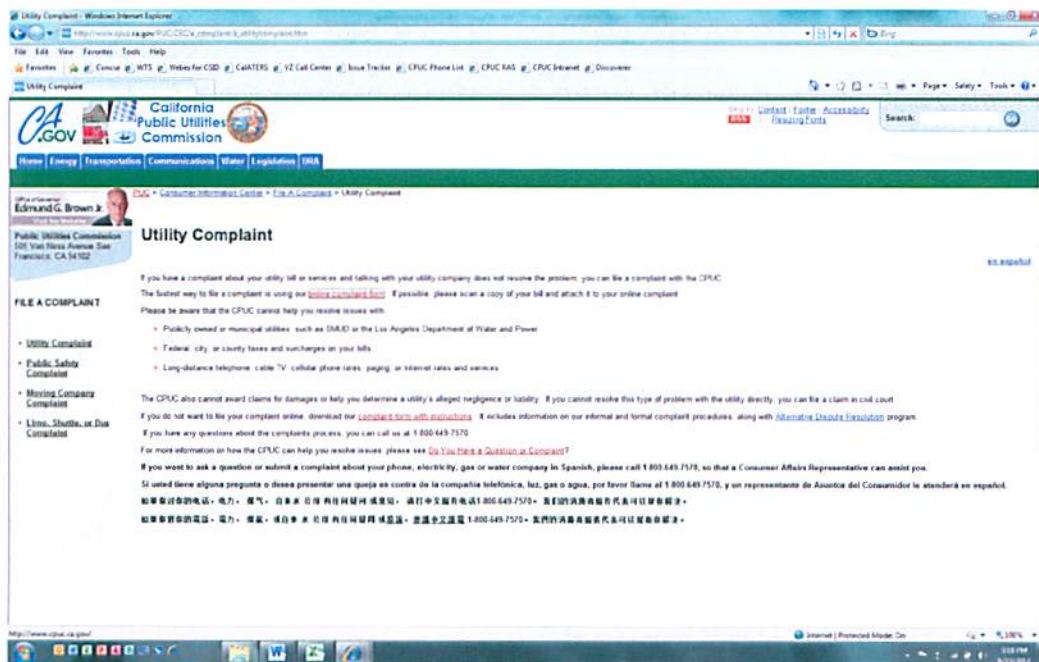
<sup>2</sup> See [http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/PUC/CEC/e\\_complaint/a\\_utilitycomplaint.htm](http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/PUC/CEC/e_complaint/a_utilitycomplaint.htm) and click on “online complaint form.” The form allows consumers to enter relevant information for the complaint, their contact information and attach any documents that pertain to their complaint.



using electronic complaints have accrued to consumers as well as the PUC. By enabling the CPUC to handle informal complaints almost entirely electronically, CIMS has made their processing quicker and more efficient. As a result, utilities now receive these complaints from CAB more quickly and, in many cases, this saves the consumer money (i.e. mailing costs) as well as time. CAB has become a near-paperless environment, and complaints are not duplicated or backlogged because of unique electronic case numbers and electronic handling from customer to CAB to utility.

The CPUC's current process for the filing of electronic complaints by consumers continues to function effectively. The process is user-friendly for consumers. With a few clicks of a mouse, consumers are able to create their own complaint case, type in the necessary details, attach any necessary documents, and then send the complaint directly to CAB. Each electronic complaint is assigned to a CAB Representative, who reviews the case details and works with the customer and the utility toward a resolution. Almost all of the communication between CAB and utilities is performed electronically through a secure web portal.

Figure 2. Snapshot of the Electronic Complaint Portion of the CPUC's Website Offering Assistance In-Language



In 2011, CAB staff and the utilities reported no significant problems with the processes or technology involved in the filing and handling of electronic complaints. However, CAB staff sometimes assists consumers with minor issues. CAB staff reports that consumers occasionally have difficulty, either because they do not follow the instructions for filing an electronic complaint correctly, or because of problems with their own computers. In these instances, CAB

staff “walk” consumers through the steps to make sure they are following them correctly and advise them to check with their Internet service provider and/or a computer consultant for assistance. Assistance with filing electronic complaints via the CPUC website is available in Spanish and Chinese.

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### III. EMPIRICAL RESULTS

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A measure of the continuing success of this program is that generally the CPUC has experienced year-to-year increases in the percentage of complaints that are received electronically.

Figure 3. Comparison of Electronic Complaints and Total Complaints

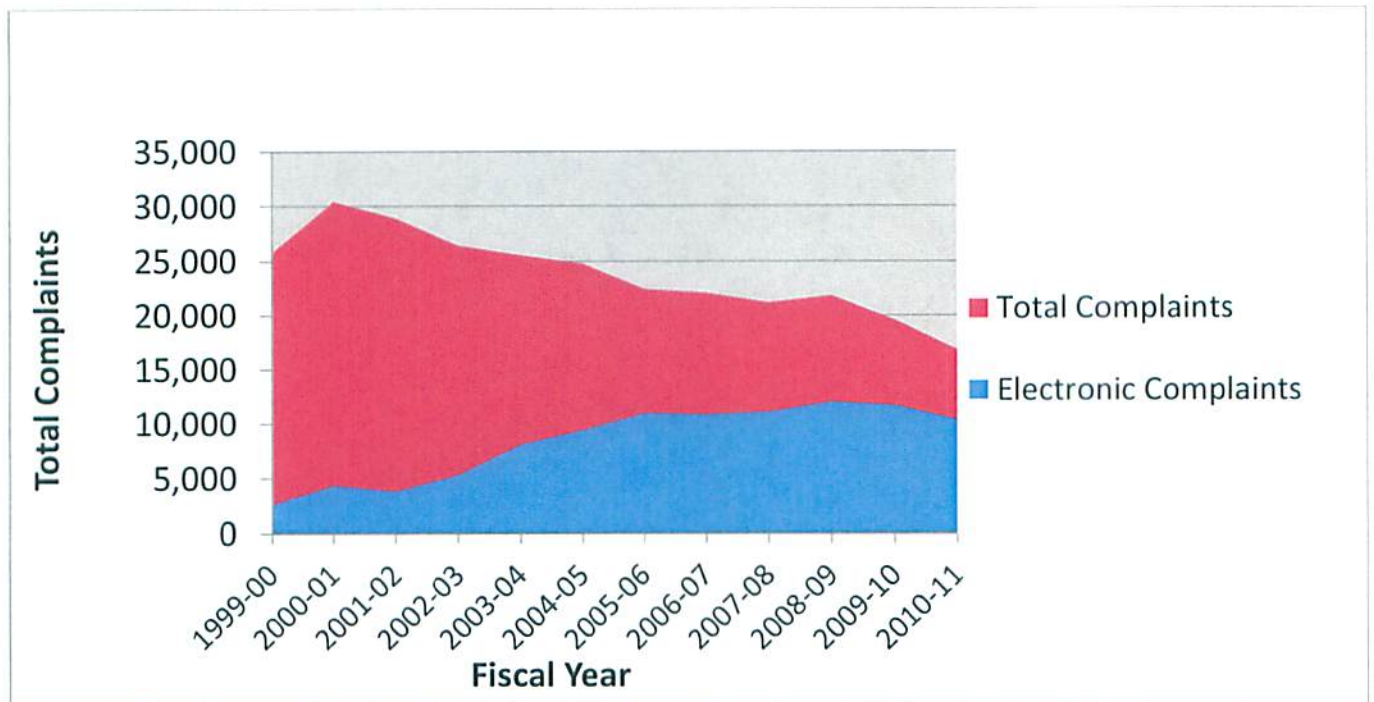


Figure 4. Percentage of Electronic Complaints Increasing

Year	Electronic Complaints	Total Complaints	Electronic Complaints as a Percentage of Total Complaints Received
1999-00	2,658	25,776	10.31%
2000-01	4,408	30,453	14.47%
2001-02	3,894	28,943	13.45%
2002-03	5,394	26,432	20.41%
2003-04	8,144	25,555	31.87%
2004-05	9,472	24,785	38.22%
2005-06	11,025	22,455	49.10%
2006-07	10,905	22,081	49.39%
2007-08	11,136	21,206	52.51%
2008-09	12,068	21,859	55.21%
2009-10	11,731	19,597	59.86%
2010-11	10,395	16,835	61.75%

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#### IV. CONCLUSION

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The CPUC's process and technology for filing complaints electronically continue to work effectively, with very few problems reported for consumers, the CPUC, or the utilities. With the introduction of the CIMS database in 2008, the CPUC's electronic complaint process was streamlined, resulting in quicker processing of complaints. These improvements continue to benefit consumers, and continue to contribute to an increase in the percentage of electronic complaints as a proportion of total complaints received by the CPUC, as reflected in Figure 4 above. This indicates that, as the CPUC's electronic complaint program has increased in efficiency and effectiveness, California consumers have become increasingly aware of and comfortable with the electronic complaint submission process.

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#### V. FURTHER INFORMATION

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Please contact Loreen R. McMahon, Director, Consumer Service and Information Division, California Public Utilities CPUC if any further information is required.