

Definitions

Consumer Affairs Branch

The following definitions were compiled to assist with understanding consumer contacts information.

Type of Contacts Definitions	
Consumer Contacts	Contacts are consumers' communications received by CAB via phone calls, letters and electronic submissions (email/web form). Contacts can consist of complaints, questions, or feedback from consumers regarding the policies and practices of specific utilities or the CPUC.
Informal Complaint (IC)	ICs are written Consumer Contacts that are received by the Consumer Affairs Branch (CAB) which are related to issues regulated through tariffs, rules, orders, or any other form of authority that originates from the Commission. This type of contact requires expanded processing and direct interaction with the appropriate utility company for investigation and response.

Category Definitions	
Category	Definition
Billing	Consumer contacts related to disputed items appearing on a consumer's utility bill, the appearance of the bill, or other utility charges.
LifeLine (Billing & Appeals)	Consumer contacts related to the Lifeline Program, which assists low income telecommunications customers. It includes items related to Lifeline Appeals or Lifeline Billing disputes.
Not Regulated - No Jurisdiction	Consumer contacts related to concerns, disputes, and issues over things where the CPUC has no jurisdiction.
Policy and Practices	Consumer contacts related to utility and/or CPUC policies and practices.
Public Purpose Programs	Consumer contacts related to programs that assist utility consumers, including low income and deaf and disabled programs.
Rates	Consumer contacts related to rate design, rate protests and baseline rates.
Service	Consumer contacts related to the service provided to the consumer by the utility.
Unknown	Category not identified due to lack of information from consumer.

Sub-Category Definitions	
Sub-Category	Definition
Abusive Marketing	Refers to the practice of misleading a utility customer by not providing a promised service or specific price, failing to provide proper disclosures, or adding extra services/features without consent from the consumer.
Backbilling	Refers to any charges appearing on the current bill for services rendered prior to the current billing period
Balance/Level Pay Plan	Refers to an electric or gas customer who pays a fixed monthly amount to average payments over a year for their specific account.
Baseline	Refers to a quantity of energy (natural gas or electric) provided at the lowest tier to all residential consumers to encourage conservation. The amount allowed varies by season, geography, and climate.
Bill Adjustment	Refers to discount allowable by a public purpose program subsidy or other discount that does not appear on the consumer's bill. Also includes issues related to credits, refunds, or rebates.
Bill Not Received	Refers to a consumer not receiving a bill either in regular mail or electronically.
Bundled Services	Refers to a pricing strategy that groups multiple services (phone, intranet, and cable) into a single price.
CARE Recertification	Refers to contacts in which the consumer has not submitted an application for recertification and/or has been dropped from the California Alternative Rates for Energy (CARE) low income assistance program.
Call Quality	Refers to service conditions (wireline and/or wireless) that negatively affect the quality of service provided by a telephone company. Example issues may be static or line noise that is affecting the quality of a call.
Cramming	Refers to the placement of ANY unauthorized charges from telephone billing corporation (such as landline carriers, wireless carriers, or resellers) on a consumer's bill by the local telecommunications company as originator of the charges.
Cramming/3 rd Party Billing	Refers to the placement of ANY unauthorized charges from the telephone billing corporation (such as landline or wireless carriers, resellers, or their billing agents) on a consumer's bill. While using a 3rd party billing, a LEC may bill on behalf of another telecommunications provider (i.e. a CLC, CLR, IEC, IER, etc.)."
Crossed Meter Billing	Refers to a billing error that occurs when meter identification numbers assigned to a meter, are inappropriately billed to an account for another premise or customer.

Sub-Category Definitions

Sub-Category	Definition
Dead Zones/Dropped Calls	Applies to wireless telecommunication services. Refers to the unreliability of incoming and outgoing calls of wireless phones/devices, or that the consumer is in an area where utility does not provide a signal or signal strength is too weak.
Delayed Orders/Missed Appointments	Refers to contacts concerning field visit appointments missed by the utility company's representative. Usually caused by delayed orders or heavy workload.
Deposits	Refers to a dispute resulting from the utility requiring a deposit to establish credit before the service is activated, to reestablish credit due to termination of service for non- or late payment, and/or over the deposit amount.
Disconnected In Error	Refers to utility disconnection of customer's service in error. This includes timing errors, incorrect account information, or when payment arrangements are kept but not attributed to a specific account.
Disconnection Non Payment	Refers to a customer's utility service being shut off. This can be initiated by the consumer or by the utility for a non-payment.
Disputed Customer of Record	Refers to a consumer being held responsible for an unpaid balance. The case will be investigated to decipher whether the current consumer derived any benefit while living with the previous account holder who was responsible for the bill.
Early Termination Fee - ETF	Refers to a fee imposed when a consumer terminates a service prior to a contractually specified end date. This is typically associated with wireless services, but can also apply to landline and/or other industries.
Electric Service Provider Contract Termination	Refers to termination of electrical service provided by an alternative Electric Service provider (ESP). Residential and small commercial customers of ESPs have the right to cancel a contract for electric service until midnight of the third business day after the day on which the buyer signs an agreement or offer to purchase. The consumer must give written notice of cancellation to the ESP.
Energy Diversion	Refers to the unauthorized use of energy due to, but not limited to, meter tampering, unauthorized connection/reconnection, theft, fraud, and/or intentional/unintentional use of energy. Also known as "energy theft".
Estimated Billing	Refers to a billing presented to a consumer using Estimated Usage or Consumption as a bill factor. The utility company will bill the customer for an estimated consumption during the billing period if accurate usage data are unavailable. Typically, the estimated consumption is based on the customer's prior usage.
High Bill	Refers to complaints regarding bills that are higher than normal, and consumers cannot account for the level of use as stated on the bill. This also includes duplicate billing issues.

Sub-Category Definitions	
Sub-Category	Definition
Late Payment Charge - LPC	Refers to a penalty amount the utility charges if the consumer fails to pay a bill by the specified due date. Usually a percentage of the past due amount.
LLB Address Error	Refers to consumer claims that they provided the utility with their correct address on the LifeLine application; however, the address transmitted to the LifeLine Administrator is not correct causing the consumer to not get the LL forms which in turn prohibited the consumer from getting the LL discount.
LLB Application Request	Refers to consumer claims that he/she has attempted to request a new LifeLine application from their carrier but has not received it.
LLB Approved for Discount	Refers to consumer claims that they are not receiving the LifeLine discount but the LifeLine Administrator confirms that they are approved to receive it for a specific telephone number.
LLB Discount Switched to Other Carrier	Refers to consumer claims that their LifeLine discount on one phone service has been applied to another phone service without consent.
LLB Federal Program/Equipment	Refers to consumer claims of attempting to secure a free or discounted phone through their Federal Lifeline program, but has not received the equipment or received a defective handset.
LLB New Phone Service Not LL Eligible	Refers to consumer claims about loss of the LifeLine discount now that he/she has another service.
Master/Sub Meters	Refers to issues with the billing system by which multi-unit building sub meters are connected to a single master meter. The master-meter holder receives a single bill from the utility and collects from tenants individually.
Master/Sub Meters (Mobile Homes)	Refers to issues with the system by which mobile home park home sub meters are connected to a single master meter and are billed directly by the utility to the account holder.
Meter Inaccuracy	Refers to erroneous billed amounts for quantity consumed because of a defective meter.
Meter Reading Issue	Refers to consumer concerns about the accuracy of meter reads, or the functioning of the meter.
Net Energy Metering (NEM)	Refers to the program that allows consumers who generate electricity via solar panels or wind turbines to be compensated if they generate more energy than they use.
Number Portability - Wireless or Landline	Refers to complaint of a problem encountered, or loss of service, when attempting to "port" (transfer) a telephone number from one carrier to another.
Obscene/Threatening/Harassing Phone Calls	Refers to consumer claims of obscene, threatening, or repetitive/harassing phone calls. It does not refer to unwanted telemarketing, political, or Robo calls.

Sub-Category Definitions	
Sub-Category	Definition
Other Charges	Refers to roaming, 411, returned check charges, transfer charges, activation fee, and charges accrued after account has been closed.
Out of Service Credit - OOS	Refers to reimbursements of credits due to outages and other disruptions of the utility services. Applies only to telecommunications providers.
Outage	Refers to any disruption in service not related to non-payment.
Payment Arrangements	Refers to a form of utility assistance that allows customers to repay a past due bill amount over a period of time.
Payment Error	Refers to misapplied payment and auto-pay errors, as well as wrong payment amount credited to account.
Premise Visit Charges	Refers to charges involved with representatives (e.g. a service technician) of a utility company visiting the consumer's premise.
Prepaid Phone Cards	Refers to any products (time, data etc.), services, disputes, etc. related to pre-paid phone cards.
Refusal To Serve	Refers to utility refusal to provide service to a customer or location because of unpaid prior bills.
Robo Calls/ADAD	Refers to calls generated by an Automatic Dialing-Announcing Device (ADAD) that delivered an unwanted or prerecorded message.
Safety	Refers to gas leaks, dropped or downed lines, open trenches/digging, tree trimming, limited/no access to emergency services (including 911) due to outages or poor service quality, utility vehicle not coned off, water quality/contamination, and safety issues relating to Propane
Slamming	Refers to any change in phone service without that customer's informed consent.
Smartmeter	Refers to contacts regarding automated digital meter reading devices for any energy and/or water utility company.
Toll Dispute	Refers to toll-related contacts, such as toll charges billed at a higher rate than quoted and toll charges generated on consumer's monthly phone bills due to their Internet Service Provider dialing a non-local number in its dial-up services.
Voltage Levels	Refers to voltage level being too high or too low and affecting the quality of energy service.
White Page Listings-Telephone Directory	Refers to disputes pertaining to the formatting or publication of local residential and business listings in the Directory.