

Mailed

AUG 7 1991

Decision 91-08-002 August 7, 1991

BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Suzanne E. Jones,  
Complainant,  
vs.  
Fort Jones Water,  
Defendant.

ORIGINAL

(ECP)  
Case 91-03-064  
(Filed March 29, 1991)

OPINION

Suzanne Jones (complainant) contests the water bill from Fort Jones Water (defendant) for the billing period July 1 to August 1, 1990. Complainant believes that the water meter must have malfunctioned, and that the usage billed could not have been consumed. Complainant paid \$10 for that billing period, contending that \$10 covers the normal usage, especially considering that nobody was at her residence for three weeks in July, and little watering was done. The contested amount is \$57.23, the difference between the \$67.23 bill and the \$10 amount paid by complainant. Complainant further argues that the meter had been tampered with, and that the dial readings may have been altered, which could explain the high readings.

Defendant responds that it confirmed the meter reading, and tested complainant's meter, which was found to be operating within the allowable limits of accuracy. Defendant argues that once a meter malfunctions, it does not later return to normal accurate operation; it continues to malfunction. In addition, as meters age, they record less, not more than the actual amount of water passing through.

Defendant further explains that the meter was not read for the two prior months' usage, May and June; rather the usage was

estimated by the meter reader, without defendant's knowledge. As a result, some of the usage billed for July may have been used during the prior months.

Defendant testified that approximately 20 other customers also experienced very high usage during the same period; each was contacted, and the meter reading checked. In most cases the usage was verified as accurate, apparently the result of both estimated reads for the two prior months, and the beginning of the season for gardening and watering. Some of these other customers had usage comparable to complainant's usage.

Complainant argues that \$10 is a normal bill, yet records of her account indicate usage as high as 31 hundred cubic feet (Ccf) in July of 1989, which corresponds to a billed amount of about \$20.61. June 1986 and 1987 usages were nearly as high at 28 and 27 Ccf, respectively. If the June, July, and August 1990 bills were averaged, considering that the usage for June and July was estimated, the average bill would be \$27.77. We believe that this level of usage is credible, considering that other customers also experienced high usage during this period. There is no compelling evidence that the usage billed was not consumed.

Finally, we note that the meter was tested and found to be accurate and the meter reading was verified. There is no compelling evidence that the meter was tampered with to alter the readings on the dial.

We conclude that the water usage as billed is correct and was consumed. We will deny the complaint.

ORDER

IT IS ORDERED that:

1. The \$57.23 fee impounded by the Commission shall be disbursed to Fort Jones Water.

2. The complaint is denied.

This order becomes effective 30 days from today.

Dated August 7, 1991, at San Francisco, California.

PATRICIA M. ECKERT  
President  
G. MITCHELL WILK  
JOHN B. OHANIAN  
NORMAN D. SHUMWAY  
Commissioners

Commissioner Daniel Wm. Fessler,  
being necessarily absent, did  
not participate.

I CERTIFY THAT THIS DECISION  
WAS APPROVED BY THE ABOVE  
COMMISSIONERS TODAY

  
NEAL J. SHULMAN, Executive Director