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Decision 92-01-045 January 21, 1992

BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Martha Blaine,
 Complainant,
 vs.
 Southern California Edison
 Company,
 Defendant.

(ECP)
 Case 91-08-023
 (Filed August 12, 1991)

Martha Blaine, for herself, complainant.
Pat Alridge, for Southern California
 Edison Company, defendant.

O P I N I O N

Complainant Martha Blaine (Blaine) disputes the Southern California Edison Company (Edison) bills for electric service in the amounts of \$60.94 for February 1991 and \$49.88 for April 1991. The total amount in dispute is \$110.82; this amount has been deposited with the Commission. Blaine argues that her electric bills should not fluctuate substantially, since she lives alone and her usage is relatively constant. Blaine's normal bills are in the mid-thirty dollar range; she believes that the February and April bills should also be in that range. Blaine believes that the meter malfunctioned or was misread by Edison. A hearing on the complaint was held on October 8, 1991.

Edison tested the meter at Blaine's residence and found it to be operating within the allowable limits of accuracy. Edison estimates that Blaine's connected appliances are capable of using over 450 kilowatt-hours (kWh) per month.

Evidence presented at the hearing indicates a likelihood that meter reading error may have occurred and caused the wide fluctuation in bills. Exhibit 2 itemizes usage for the past year: January 1991 usage was 315 kWh, while February usage was 483 kWh. The corresponding average daily usage was 9.8 kWh in January and 16.1 kWh in February, or more than a 60% increase in February. However, if we assume that the January 30 reading was in error, and average the usage for January and February, we find a monthly average of 398 kWh and an average daily usage of 12.9, which are within Blaine's historic usage range and consistent with her appliance load. It is understandable that Blaine felt the fluctuation between 9.8 and 16.1 was in error.

Similarly, the April usage bill was 406 kWh with an average daily usage of 14.0 kWh, compared to the March usage of 307 kWh with an average daily usage of 9.9 kWh. The variation between these months exceeds 40%. If we again assume a misreading in March and average the usage for March and April, we find a monthly usage of 357 kWh and an average daily usage of 11.9 kWh. Similar to January and February, these average usage levels appear consistent with appliance load and historic usage.

Whether the meter was misread cannot be determined at this time. However, we conclude that the meter itself accurately recorded usage. An inaccurate meter would not have tested accurate by Edison, since once meters malfunction they continue to malfunction.

A misreading does not affect the meter function and subsequent meter readings, since the meter continues to record cumulative usage, in the same manner as an automobile odometer records miles. A misreading one month would be automatically corrected the next month with an accurate reading. Although the individual bills would fluctuate, the customer would be correctly charged overall.

We conclude that the meter is accurate and that the usage as billed was consumed. We will deny the complaint.

However, we are concerned that this complaint very likely resulted from misreadings of the meter. We encourage Edison to take appropriate steps to reduce the incidence of meter misreadings, which action should also reduce the likelihood of complaints of this type. Blaine is a sincere person and a good customer of Edison; she is entitled to accurate meter reading and billings.

ORDER

IT IS ORDERED that:

1. The \$110.82 deposited with the Commission shall be disbursed to Southern California Edison Company on the effective date of this order.

2. This complaint is denied.

This order becomes effective 30 days from today.

Dated January 21, 1992, at San Francisco, California.

DANIEL Wm. FESSLER
President
JOHN B. OHANIAN
PATRICIA M. ECKERT
NORMAN D. SHUMWAY
Commissioners

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


NEAL J. SHULMAN, Executive Director