

ORIGINAL

Decision No. 91912 JUN 17 1980

BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Residential Builders Association
of San Francisco, Inc.,

Complainant,

vs.

Pacific Gas & Electric Company,
San Francisco, CA.,

Defendant.

Case No. 10739
(Filed May 2, 1979)

Dominick Franco, Attorney at Law, for
Residential Builders Association of San
Francisco, Inc., complainant.
Harry W. Long, Attorney at Law, for Pacific
Gas and Electric Company, defendant.

O P I N I O N

By its complaint filed May 2, 1979 Residential Builders Association of San Francisco, Inc. (complainant) requests an order of the Commission directing Pacific Gas and Electric Company (defendant) to discontinue a company policy requiring that both gas and electric meters be accessible from the outside of new and remodeled homes and small commercial buildings within San Francisco.

A public hearing was held before Administrative Law Judge Daly on February 8, 1980 at San Francisco, and the matter was submitted upon the receipt of concurrent briefs.

Complainant is an association of small residential builders in San Francisco. According to its president, complainant's members perform 80 percent of the wood framing for new homes within the city.

Because many residences in San Francisco are built on 25-foot lots and not detached, meters are installed within the premises and meter readings are made through view windows provided for that purpose.

By letter dated December 28, 1978 defendant informed builders and contractors that as of February 1, 1979 it would be necessary in the case of newly constructed and remodeled homes, as well as small commercial buildings, that gas and electric meters would have to be made accessible from the outside and provision would have to be made for meters to be installed in the front of such buildings either as open meter sets or in meter cabinets opening to the outside. As an alternative to placing a gas meter on the outside of the building, defendant indicated that it would install a gas sidewalk curb meter for \$104.

Defendant's change in policy was prompted by problems relating to missed readings, inspections, replacement of meters, and the possibility that its employees might be subjected to charges of vandalism and theft. Complainant contends that the problem is one of accessibility and could be solved by installing, in the front of the building, a small metal box which the meter reader could open with a master key. The metal box could contain a key providing access to the meters located within the premises. Meter reading, service, or replacement of meters could, according to complainant, be accomplished at any time with a cost of only \$5 for a metal box as compared to a cost of \$104 for a curb gas meter.

Defendant claims that there were over 72,000 missed meter readings during the first four months of 1979, many of which were caused by blocked view windows or intentionally covered meter dials. This was 393 percent higher than defendant's system average. Defendant contends that placing meters inside buildings facilitates the possibility of stealing energy by means of bypassing the meter

and enhances the risk of fire because gas regulators in meters are a potential source of leaks. Defendant also contends that it interferes with the servicing and replacement of meters resulting in return trips by the servicemen and inconvenience to customers.

In the case of commercial establishments and apartment complexes, defendant is willing to arrange for meter reading in locked areas if a key is provided. Defendant takes the position that a similar arrangement for single homes or small (less than five) apartments is not feasible because the increased time, exposure to liability, and cost occasioned by such access cannot be justified.

A utility has not only the right but the duty to require that meters be made accessible for safety, service, and operational purposes. With the exception of San Francisco, defendant has required that residential meters be located outside of premises. The installation of meters in garages and basements creates many problems not only for the utility but for fire and police departments in the event of fire, earthquake, or building collapse. Defendant's new rule relating to newly constructed or remodeled homes in San Francisco is a reasonable application of its Rules 16 and 20 governing the installation of meters.

Findings of Fact

After consideration the Commission finds that:

1. As of February 1, 1979 defendant inaugurated a rule change that both gas and electric meters be accessible from the outside in the case of new and remodeled homes and small commercial buildings within the city of San Francisco.

2. The rule change will facilitate the reading of meters installed at newly constructed and remodeled homes and small commercial buildings. It will also provide ready access to meters for the purpose of inspection, servicing, and in time of emergencies. It is a reasonable application of defendant's Rules 16 and 20 governing the installation of meters and works no hardship on complainant or its members.

The Commission concludes that the complaint should be denied.

O R D E R

IT IS ORDERED that the relief requested by Residential Builders Association of San Francisco, Inc. is denied.

The effective date of this order shall be thirty days after the date hereof.

Dated AUG 17 1980 , at San Francisco, California.

John E. Byrne
President
William L. Stinson

Clara J. DeLoach
James W. Quinn
Commissioners

Commissioner Richard D. Gravello, being necessarily absent, did not participate in the disposition of this proceeding.