

ALJ/RAB/sid *

Decision 97-09-002 September 3, 1997

Mailed

SEP 4 1997

BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

BARRY W. REED,

Complainant,

vs.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA GAS COMPANY
(U 904 G),

Defendant.

ORIGINAL

(ECP)
Case 97-04-060
(Filed April 28, 1997)

Barry W. Reed, for himself, complainant.
Sid M. Newsom, for Southern California Gas
Company, defendant.

OPINION

Complainant alleges that his gas bills are too high and seeks a \$300 adjustment. Southern California Gas Company (SoCalGas) alleges that the account at issue has been billed correctly and that all billings were correctly calculated using current tariffs. Public hearing was held June 4, 1997.

Complainant testified that he lives alone in a three-bedroom home. He tries to conserve gas by shutting off the heat vents in some of the rooms in his house and reducing the temperature on his water heater. He said his meter is not always read; sometimes it is estimated. For example, he did not understand how he could have received a bill for \$18 when he had been out-of-town, yet only paid \$14 when he occupied the home the entire month. Because of his extensive program of conservation, he does not believe that he is using the gas registering on his meter. He complained to the company in early 1996.

SoCalGas' witness testified that on March 11, 1996, a High Bill Investigation was completed. SoCalGas' field representative obtained a meter reading of 0990. This

confirmed that the meter reading of 0920 obtained on February 12, 1996 was accurate. As part of the investigation, a registration check of the house line indicated that there was no gas leakage.

On April 11, 1996, SoCalGas' meter reader was unable to read complainant's gas meter as his gate was locked, preventing access to the meter. The meter read was estimated to be 1064, which generated a billing of \$47.07 for 73 therms. On April 16, 1996, complainant's meter was changed because complainant continued to dispute the billing. The reading on the removed meter was 1055. On May 7, 1996, complainant's estimated April billing was corrected because the estimated meter reading was higher than the actual use. SoCalGas' billing department changed the reading to 1010, which resulted in a corrected billing of \$13.58 for 17 therms. It was then determined that this correction was also in error, and a final corrected reading of 1046 was obtained with a final billing of \$33.83 for 54 therms.

SoCalGas stated that on August 14, 1996, complainant's meter that had been previously removed was tested and complainant was present during the testing procedure. The meter read was verified to be 1055, and the results of the meter test revealed that the instrument was recording well within the Commission's authorized 2% tolerance.

While we applaud complainant's conservation effort, we cannot avoid the fact that defendant's meter operated properly throughout the time in question. We also are aware of the confusion that sometimes is associated with estimated bills later corrected. Nevertheless, the gas was used. A review of complainant's gas bills shows unremarkable consumption with normal seasonal fluctuations.

O R D E R

IT IS ORDERED that the relief requested in the complaint is denied. This case is closed.

This order is effective today.

Dated September 3, 1997, at San Francisco, California.

P. GREGORY CONLON

President

JESSIE J. KNIGHT, JR.

HENRY M. DUQUE

JOSIAH L. NEEPER

RICHARD A. BILAS

Commissioners