

**PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION OF OREGON
STAFF REPORT
PUBLIC MEETING DATE: November 5, 2019**

REGULAR _____ CONSENT X EFFECTIVE DATE November 5, 2019

DATE: October 28, 2019

TO: Public Utility Commission

FROM: Mitchell Moore

THROUGH: Jason Eisdorfer and John Crider **SIGNED**

SUBJECT: PORTLAND GENERAL ELECTRIC:
(Docket No. UM 1631)
Requests partial waiver of rule related to disconnect residential electric service.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Commission approve Portland General Electric's partial waiver request of OAR 860-021-0405(11) be approved, with an effective date of November 5, 2019.

ISSUE:

Whether the Commission should approve PGE's request for a partial waiver of OAR 860-021-0405(11), which concerns Notice of Pending Disconnection of Residential Electric or Gas Utility Service.

DISCUSSION:

Applicable Law

OAR 860-021-0405 addresses the notice requirements an energy utility must perform prior to disconnection of residential utility service. Subsection (11) of this rule states: "When the energy utility makes personal contact under this rule, the utility's representative making contact is empowered to accept reasonable partial payment of the overdue balance under the time-payment provisions of OAR 860-021-0415.

OAR 860-021-0005 allows the Commission to grant waivers of Division 21 rules for good cause shown.

Filings that propose any change in rates, tolls, charges, rules, or regulations must be filed with the Commission at least 30 days before the effective date of the change. See ORS 757.220; OAR 860-022-0020.

Overview

On October 4, 2019, PGE filed this application requesting a partial waiver to OAR 860-021-0405(11). This subsection of the rule requires a PGE employee to accept partial payment of the customer's overdue balance when onsite performing a disconnection of service. PGE is requesting a waiver from the requirement to accept payment at the customer's doorstep, based on concerns for employee safety.

Analysis

The waiver request affects only those customers without remote connect meters, and where disconnection of service must be made in the field. The proposed waiver will enable PGE to cease field collections from customers of overdue billed amounts prior to manually disconnecting service.

PGE has documented an increase in the number of reported threats to field employees over the past three years, and believes that when personnel are known to carry cash in their vehicles it increases the likelihood of being targeted.

PGE states in its filing that the existing communications channels providing notice of a pending disconnection, as well as the numerous low-cost payment options provides ample time and opportunity for customers to pay overdue bills.

Before disconnection the Company provides customers with a monthly bill with due date; automated calls; past due notice; and an urgent notice warning about pending disconnection. In addition PGE field personnel does currently, and will continue, to knock on the customer's door to attempt personal contact with customer to make them aware of the disconnection.

Payment options provided by PGE include: automatic withdrawal through the customer's bank; 24/7 payment online; U.S. mail; by telephone through an automated system or with an employee; payment in person at Western Union locations, and at PGE community offices.

Upon Commission approval, PGE plans to notify customers affected by the waiver through numerous communication channels, including letters and postcards, explaining the process change of no longer accepting payments in the field.

Conclusion

Staff reviewed the Company's filing and supports its request for a partial waiver of OAR 860-021-0405(11). PGE has documented increased instances of physical and verbal threats to field personnel in the past three years. Staff agrees that public knowledge of employees carrying cash may increase the likelihood of them being a target. Staff also believes that the multiple existing communications and payments channels and opportunities provides sufficient opportunities for customers to pay an overdue bill prior to service being disconnected.

Granting this waiver strikes the necessary balance between PGE's employee safety and customer service. For these reasons, Staff recommends approval.

PROPOSED COMMISSION MOTION:

Approve PGE's partial waiver request of OAR 860-021-0405(11), with an effective date of November 5, 2019.