

## UTILITY CONCERNS: HOW TO MAKE A COMPLAINT TO THE AUC

### What is the AUC's role in regulating utilities?

As an independent, quasi-judicial agency of the Government of Alberta, the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC) regulates investor-owned natural gas, electric, and water utilities and certain municipally owned electric utilities to ensure that customers receive safe and reliable service at just and reasonable rates. In setting rates, the AUC must allow a utility to recover its reasonable costs of providing the service, including a fair return on its investment, in order that it will be financially viable and able to provide customers with adequate service now and in the future. This regulatory role is in a state of evolution due to the ongoing restructuring of the natural gas and electric industries. In establishing rates, our mandate is to balance the interests of both customers and the utility companies. Our powers are established through legislation—the AUC cannot exert jurisdiction over matters that are not provided to it by legislation. The AUC also ensures that electric facilities are built, operated, and decommissioned in an efficient and environmentally responsible way.

#### *Electric Utilities*

Before the restructuring of the electric industry, one company typically provided generation, transmission, distribution, and sale of electricity to customers. The price of generation is no longer regulated, as power is freely traded through an exchange operated by the independent Alberta Electric System Operator (AESO).

Since deregulation, eligible customers may choose to continue receiving their energy from a retailer that is regulated by the AUC, called the regulated rate option (RRO), or they may choose to obtain their energy from a competitive retailer, however their electricity distributor will remain the same. Transmission and distribution remain fully regulated, because they are natural monopolies. Regulation is necessary to set the prices for those parts of the electric industry where competition is not practical or possible.

The regulated rate option (RRO), formerly referred to as the regulated rate tariff, or RRT, is a pass-through of costs associated with procuring electric energy. Residential and farm customers, as well as small commercial and industrial customers whose annual consumption of electricity does not exceed 250 000 kilowatt hours (kWh), are able to remain on a regulated rate.

These energy charges, billed by the retailer, form one component of

customers' bills. Other charges recover the distributor's costs of delivering the electricity to customer's homes.

### **Natural Gas**

The AUC regulates investor-owned natural gas utilities in Alberta, ensuring that rates customers pay are just and reasonable and that the service provided is safe and adequate. The AUC does not set rates for municipally owned gas utilities, rural gas co-ops, or competitive retailers.

Two main components determine what consumers pay for natural gas: the delivery cost, and the cost of the gas commodity. The delivery cost, which represents the cost of transporting gas to a customer, is regulated by the AUC. The delivery rates approved by the Commission allow the distributor to recover its reasonable costs of providing service, including a fair return on its investment.

The AUC does not set natural gas commodity prices in Alberta. The North American market determines gas prices, and the monthly prices used by the retailers reflect the Alberta market conditions. The AUC has established a framework for the retailers to file their gas cost rates monthly, based solely on market factors, without any mark-up on the price of gas. Under this framework, the AUC reviews the gas cost applications to ensure that only the actual cost of the gas is passed on to customers. For customers in the ATCO service territory, retail services are provided by Direct Energy Regulated Services. AltaGas, on the other hand, provides both distribution and retail services.

Since deregulation, eligible customers may choose to continue receiving their gas from a retailer that is regulated by the AUC, or they may choose to obtain their energy from a competitive retailer, however their natural gas distributor will remain the same.

### **What if I am unhappy with the service provided by my utility company or need further information?**

Concerns about service problems, such as outages, and meter reading issues should be raised with your distributor. Any concerns respecting your billing should be raised with your retailer. If you are still dissatisfied after speaking directly with the retailer and/or the distributor, you may contact the AUC for assistance. The AUC deals with complaints respecting those companies that it regulates.

It is important to understand that the AUC's authority to deal with your complaint is limited to certain legislated powers, which mainly include the terms, conditions, and rates under which a regulated utility provides services to its customers. In some situations, your dispute may be beyond the AUC's

jurisdiction.

<b>Regulated Retailers:</b>	<b>Toll-Free Phone Number:</b>	<b>Distributors:</b>	<b>Toll-Free Phone Number:</b>
AltaGas Utilities	1-866-222-2067	AltaGas Utilities	1-866-222-2067
Direct Energy	1-866-420-3174	ATCO Gas	310-5678
Regulated Services (Gas)			
Direct Energy	1-888-420-3181	ATCO Electric	1-800-668-2248
Regulated Services (Electricity)			
ENMAX Energy (Calgary customers)	310-2010	ENMAX Power (Calgary Customers)	1-877-579-7999
EPCOR Energy (Edmonton Customers)	(780) 412-4000	EPCOR Distribution and Transmission (Edmonton Customers)	(780) 412-4500
EPCOR Energy Alberta (Fortis Customers)	310-4300	FortisAlberta (formerly Aquila)	310-WIRE (9473)

**How do I make a complaint about my utility service?**

If you are not satisfied with the response of your utility company, contact the AUC by telephone, letter, fax, or e-mail, detailing the nature of the issue, the facts surrounding the complaint, and the action you would like. Please note that complaints need to be received in writing to proceed to a more formal review level at the AUC. This written complaint must also state your permission for the AUC to investigate the matter on your behalf and allow the utility to release personal information to the AUC. A [complaint form](#) is available on the AUC Web site.

To place a complaint about your utility rates or service, contact:

**Consumer Relations**

Tenth Floor, 10055 – 106 Street  
 Edmonton, Alberta T5J 2Y2  
 Telephone: 780-427-4903  
 (for toll free access, dial 310-000 then enter 780-427-4901 and press 1)  
 Fax: 780-427-6970  
 Email: [consumer-relations@auc.ab.ca](mailto:consumer-relations@auc.ab.ca)

**What happens to my complaint?**

AUC staff will let you know by letter, e-mail, or telephone that the AUC has received your written complaint. If we do not need an explanation from the utility in question, we will send you information directly from our office. However, usually we contact the utility first and have it report back to us or to

you regarding your inquiry. We will then review the utility's response and contact you by letter, explaining our findings. The time it takes to resolve the matter depends on the nature of your complaint and the complexity of the issue. Sometimes a public hearing may be required to resolve the complaint. If you are not satisfied with the resolution or information provided, you may contact the AUC for further clarification. This process will not change the rate and regulations approved by the AUC in current decisions.

### ***AUC Hearings***

A hearing is the traditional tool used by the AUC to reach a decision when issues cannot be otherwise resolved. It provides all parties involved with the opportunity to publicly express their views before an AUC panel in a fair and orderly forum, similar to a court of law.

If a hearing is to be held, the AUC may provide a Notice of Hearing in writing to interested parties or publish it in local newspapers. In response to a notice, those with concerns about the issue may submit their views in writing to the AUC and thus become interveners. A written submission or intervention is usually a letter or report that clearly outlines your views and concerns about the issue. A group or association that wishes to present a collective point of view may also be an intervener. All information submitted to the AUC for the purpose of any hearing is available to the public for viewing.

As an applicant or intervener, you may choose to represent yourself at the hearing or be represented by a lawyer. In either case, AUC staff will be available to assist you with any procedural questions.

### ***The Decision***

As part of Commission policy, a decision must be issued within 90 days of the close of the proceeding. In making its decision following a hearing, the AUC panel considers all views of the hearing participants and determines what it feels is in the best interest of the parties involved. As a hearing participant, you will receive a copy of the panel's decision, which includes the reasons for its findings.

### **What if my complaint is outside the AUC's jurisdiction?**

For information on **retail marketers** of natural gas and electric power, contact the *Utilities Consumer Advocate* from anywhere in Alberta at 310-4822 or check out the Utilities Consumer Advocate's Web site at [www.ucahelp.gov.ab.ca](http://www.ucahelp.gov.ab.ca).

For concerns about services provided by **retail marketers** of natural gas and electric power, contact them directly.

For concerns about **municipally owned utilities**, contact your local service provider, your local council members or mayor. The AUC has only limited authority over these utilities, restricted to investigating specific complaints when a consumer believes rates are discriminatory, improperly imposed, or fail to conform to the rate structure established by the municipality. The only exception is that effective January 1, 2004, the AUC assumed full jurisdiction over the electrical distribution and regulated rate option (RRO) and terms and conditions of service of EPCOR in the City of Edmonton, and ENMAX in the City of Calgary.

For concerns about **natural gas cooperatives**, contact the co-op manager or directors or the Rural Utilities Branch at:

**Rural Utilities Branch**

**Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Planning and Competitiveness Sector**

Petroleum Plaza North Tower

9945 – 108 Street

Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2G6

Telephone: 780-427-0944 (to call toll free, dial 310-0000 first)

Note that the AUC does have a limited complaint authority over natural gas co-ops. It may hear complaints about terms of service, service charges, and rates or tolls if a customer thinks they are discriminatory, improperly imposed, or fail to conform to the co-op's established rate structure. Anyone wishing to receive gas co-op services may file a complaint with the AUC if that service is not provided. These complaints must be sent by registered mail to both the AUC's Chairman and to the Chief Officer of the Rural Utilities Branch.

For Rural Electrification Associations (REAs), contact the directors of the specific REA or the Alberta Federation of REAS at:

**The Federation of REAs**

#100 – 115 Portage Close

Sherwood Park, Alberta T8H 2R5

Telephone: (780) 417-3396

Toll free: 1-877-717-3496

The AUC also has limited jurisdiction to hear complaints about the distribution tariffs of REAs.

For **telecommunications utilities**, such as telephone and cable television services, contact:

**Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC)**

Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0N2

Toll free: 1-877-249-2782

## Where may I get more information?

The following, are available on the AUC Web site at [www.auc.ab.ca](http://www.auc.ab.ca), may be of assistance:

- *AUC Information No. 3: Electricity and the AUC*
- *AUC Information No. 4: Natural Gas Utilities*

### Contact Information

If you would like general information or assistance with filing a complaint, please contact us at:

#### Consumer Relations

Tenth Floor, 10055 – 106 Street

Edmonton, Alberta T5J 2Y2

Telephone: 780-427-4903

(for toll free access, dial 310-000 then enter 780-427-4901 and press 1)

Fax: 780-427-6970

E-mail: [consumer-relations@auc.ab.ca](mailto:consumer-relations@auc.ab.ca)

If you need more information or assistance with a specific utility application, please contact us at the above address or at:

#### AUC Calgary Office

Fifth Avenue Place

400, 425 First Street SW

Calgary, Alberta T2P 3L8

Telephone: 403-592-UTIL (8845)\*

Fax: 403-592-4406

\*All Government of Alberta phone numbers given here are part of the provincial government's RITEdirect telephone system. RITEdirect is a toll free, long-distance service that public callers may use to reach Alberta Government offices. To call toll free, dial 310-0000 and then enter the 7-digit local number to connect or press zero and hold for a RITE operator.

## Additional Information

For additional information on the AUC or its processes or if you have general questions about utilities in the province of Alberta, contact the AUC Monday to Friday (8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.), at **403-592-UTIL (8845)**

This AUC Information is one in a series.

- [No. 1](#) *What Is the Alberta Utilities Commission?*
- [No. 2](#) *Having Your Say at an AUC Hearing*
- [No. 3](#) *Electricity and the AUC*
- [No. 4](#) *Natural Gas Utilities*
- [No. 5](#) *How to Make a Complaint to the AUC*

## AUC Offices

---

<b>Head Office</b>	403-592-8845
Fifth Avenue Place Fourth Floor, 425 First Street SW Calgary, Alberta T2P 3L8	

---

---

<b>Edmonton Office</b>	780-427-4901
HSBC Bldg. Tenth Floor, 10055 – 106 Street Edmonton, Alberta T5J 2Y2	

---

**To call the above numbers toll free, dial 310-0000.**