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2 Feedback from group about the last winter moratorium cycle

- General consensus among all parties was that the 2017-18 winter moratorium cycle went smoothly.

UCA Report

- Statistics: There were additional customers on the list last year (2100 in 2016/17 increased to 3500 in 2017/18). The UCA was successful in reconnecting 111 customers. In addition to all of the in-house utility provider work, 438 total sites were reconnected in total. The UCA facilitated payment arrangements for 53 consumers, billing dispute resolutions for 27, and third party services for 30.
- Introduced email protocol last year (after internal review for efficiency – sent 3500 letters, 900 returned unopened, only 48 responded). Just under 1500 emails were sent, with 58 responses received. The results were very positive, so the UCA requests that retailers continue collecting as many emails as possible, especially with a potential Canada Post strike coming up.
- There were almost 500 accounts with no phone numbers, so the UCA requests that retailers include them if possible. Also, if a number is known to be wrong (the customer has already advised), please do not include the number in the template.
- Submission accuracy of the lists was good, with only minimal areas where things had to be sent back. The UCA stated that the same spreadsheet from last year will be used, but retailers should be sure that the formatting is consistent, especially around dates (the default format shouldn't be changed).
- There was a big increase in receiving sites that were not turned off for non-payment reasons. Examples included a well site, yard lights, summer properties where consumers asked for their service to be shut off, properties disconnected for fires, multi-suite units (apartment buildings owned by one landlord are not considered a vulnerable site if power is off for the whole building). Retailers should scrub these sites from the list before submitting them.
- 300 customers confirmed they did not need services reconnected. Many of these customers had moved away, so the UCA requests that retailers, where possible, remove from the list those who are known to have moved or passed away.

- There were many repeat customers, and last year saw a huge increase in first-timers.

UCA Recommendations

- Reminder: If gas service has been off for more than six months at a site, in some municipalities there is a need for an inspection. This is an additional cost which may not be covered by financial assistance.
 - AUI doesn't have the six month permit requirement, and not all ATCO Gas sites need it either depending on the municipality. Some retailers, such as DERS, already include a reminder of the potential inspection requirement in their mail outs and phone calls.
 - Accordingly, the UCA will update its information about the need for gas inspection to suit the variability, warning people that timelines for inspection may differ.
- Scrubbing lists: customers included on the list should only be those cut off for non-payment, not those who have asked for service disconnections or are commercial properties.
 - The AUC inquired if the customer information was being pulled from the UCI or customer and billing systems, to which the majority of retailers indicated the latter.
- One of the challenges the UCA faces occurs when the following happens:
 - The UCA is given the list of customers, which includes the amount the customer currently owes, and then reaches out to the customer and works out payment arrangements.
 - After all of this work, the UCA is sometimes informed by the retailer that the amount the customer owes is now different.
 - The UCA requested that for WURP, payment arrangements for reconnection should be based on the amounts included on the spreadsheet (which should encompass any reconnection or other applicable fees that are required for the customer's account to be cleared). If additional funds are owed after the list is sent to the UCA, these should be dealt with after between the retailer and the customer.
- The UCA also indicated that it is comfortable telling customers that payment arrangements are conditional on the first payment clearing, but requested that retailers respond consistently when the customer is on the WURP list and the UCA is trying to mediate payment arrangements.
- Distributors should continue their site visits for customers who owe \$50 or less on their accounts but remain disconnected.
- When scrubbing lists, please remove all customers that the retailer has already spoken with and for whom a turn-on order has already been issued.

Other Issues

- UCA asked ATCO Gas how their first year of offering reconnections without appointments went.
 - ATCO Gas indicated that the program is going well.

3 Referral process – social service agencies to provide updated contact and process information.

- There has been one contact change in the NE region, so Alberta Works will send an updated list to the AUC.
- The process has not changed; customers should still be sent to Alberta Works offices. For rural communities, they can phone the contact center or one of the offices. Workers will sometimes go out to rural areas to meet with people.
- Alberta Works offices are closed between Christmas and New Year's, but the income support contact center is still open. In the interest of providing the center with an overview of the sorts of situations that might come up during the closure, Alberta Works inquired if electricity retailers enact load limiters during the Christmas period.
 - All utilities responded that they do not install load limiters during this period.

ACTION:

The AUC will circulate the updated (by Alberta Works) contact list, at the same time it circulates the template from the UCA. Stakeholders to review and provide any changes to last year's Winter Utilities Reconnection Program contact list, and send to regulatorypolicy@auc.ab.ca by October 15, 2018.

4 UCA Process

- Lists must be submitted to the UCA (and distributors) by Friday, October 26, 2018, at 4:30 pm. Retailers were reminded to please use the default formatting in the template, and to ensure that the mailing address is a legitimate mailing address rather than a duplicate of the physical address. Because a postal strike is possible, in which case the UCA will not be able to send any physical mail out, email addresses are a necessity.
- Retailers were also requested to provide a general idea of the number of customers that have been pulled into the initial list so that the UCA can order sufficient stationery.

ACTION:

UCA to resend last year's template to the AUC for recirculation.

ACTION:

Retailers to provide the UCA with the number of customers in their initial list pulls by week after meeting (week of October 8, 2018).

ACTION:

Retailers to provide the UCA (and distributors) with their finalized, scrubbed lists by 4:30 pm on Friday, October 26, 2018.

5 Distributor site visit process and timelines

- A distributor inquired if there is a date by which the distributors' site visits must be completed.
 - UCA has never set a deadline, as these have always been small numbers and distributors have performed site visits quickly in the past. This timely practice is expected to continue.

6 Other issues and next steps

- One retailer shared that in looking at its preliminary list, the number of customers who have paid but remain disconnected has gone way up from last year and inquired if anyone knew why this might be or if they were encountering the same. Other retailers were unsure and did not have comparable numbers to assess if this was a widespread trend this year.
- The UCA pointed out that it has noticed an increase in competitive retailers choosing to disconnect customers rather than dropping them to the RRO provider. This number is currently low, but the UCA will continue to monitor.
- The AUC asked if customers who chose not to reconnect before the winter are tracked in some way, and what that number might be.
 - The UCA stated that it could try to track the number for this year.
- The UCA inquired about possibilities for dealing with people who live on reserve land and are therefore ineligible for most provincial funding assistance. There are challenges when a band denies the customer funding and it's a recurring problem.
 - Alberta Works assistance is restricted due to the federal government's jurisdiction over reserve lands.
- AUC staff thanked all parties for their participation and continued hard work on this initiative.