

Rule 003

Service Standards for Energy Service Providers

This rule as amended was approved by the Alberta Utilities Commission on March 23, 2020, and is effective March 23, 2020.

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1 General provisions

1.1 Rule application

- (1) The quality of service provided to customers by a default supply provider or a regulated rate provider is measured under this Rule 003. The quality of service provided by owners of electric distribution systems that are electric utilities, as defined in the *Electric Utilities Act*, and by gas distributors, as defined in the *Gas Utilities Act*, is measured under Rule 002: *Service Quality and Reliability Performance Monitoring and Reporting for Owners of Electric Distribution Systems and for Gas Distributors*, even if that service is to the same sites or customers as those provided under this rule.
- (2) Section 3.4 of this rule applies to Energy Service Providers (ESP).

1.2 Definitions

In this rule,

- (a) “business day” means any day other than Saturday, Sunday or a statutory holiday in Alberta, except for Easter Monday;
- (b) “Commission” means the Alberta Utilities Commission;
- (c) “default supply provider” has the meaning ascribed to the term in Part 2.1 of the *Gas Utilities Act*;
- (d) “ESP” means an RSP, a retailer, a rural electrification association, and a municipally-owned electric utility;
- (e) “ISO” means the Independent System Operator as defined in the *Electric Utilities Act*;
- (f) “RSP” means a regulated rate provider or a default supply provider;
- (g) “regulated rate provider” has the meaning ascribed to the term in the *Electric Utilities Act*;
- (h) “retailer” has the meaning ascribed to the term in the *Electric Utilities Act* and the *Gas Utilities Act* but in this rule applies to retailers that serve customers who consume less than 250,000 kilowatt-hours (kWh) or 2,500 gigajoules (GJ) annually;
- (i) “Rule 003 annual report” means the reporting of service quality and reliability performance, as detailed in this Rule 003, prepared and submitted annually in accordance with Section 2.2;

- (j) “Rule 003 quarterly report” means the reporting of service quality and reliability performance metrics, as detailed in this Rule 003, prepared and submitted quarterly in accordance with Section 2.1;
- (k) “rural electrification association” has the meaning ascribed to the term in the *Electric Utilities Act*;
- (l) “site” has the meaning given to it in Rule 021: *Settlement System Code Rules* and in Rule 028: *Natural Gas Settlement System Code Rules*; and
- (m) “TBF” means tariff bill file within the meaning of Rule 004: *Alberta Tariff Billing Code Rules*.

1.3 Application of Section 3.4

For purposes of Section 3.4 of this rule,

- (a) “customer” includes a member receiving electricity services from a rural electrification association;
- (b) “customer bill” means an invoice issued to a customer;
- (c) “incorrect customer bill” means a bill issued to a customer that contains:
 - (i) an error in the name or address of the customer, or in the items referred to in Section 4 of the *Billing Regulation, 2003* for electricity services or in Section 9 of the *Default Gas Supply Regulation* for gas service; or
 - (ii) a calculation error;
- (d) “late customer bill” means a bill issued to a customer in excess of 90 days from the day the ESP received the tariff charge for the customer’s site displayed on the bill and the ESP had a record of the customer’s information for billing purposes at the time the tariff charges were received;
- (e) “tariff charge” has the meaning given to it in Rule 004: *Alberta Tariff Billing Code Rules*; and
- (f) “unexpected customer bill” means a bill issued by an ESP to a person who is not a customer of the ESP, or is a customer of the ESP but is not the person financially responsible for the bill.

2 Measurement and reporting protocol

For the purpose of collecting data and reporting on performance in each of the categories established in sections 3 and 4, the RSP must comply with the information filing requirements set out in this Section 2.

The RSP must advise the Commission of any change to the RSP's internal reporting methods that may impact its ability to comply with this Rule 003 and provide an explanation for the change prior to implementing such a change. Any data related to this rule that reflects significantly altered measurement procedures or internal data acquisition methods shall be subject to Commission review and approval.

2.1 Rule 003 quarterly report

- (1) Reporting periods shall be calendar quarters, with Rule 003 quarterly reports submitted to the Commission by the last day of the month following the end of each quarter: April 30 is the deadline for the first quarter report, July 31 is the deadline for the second quarter report, October 31 for the third quarter report and January 31 for the fourth quarter report.
- (2) Unless specifically identified as being reported only in the Rule 003 annual report, metrics identified as required in this Rule 003 are required to be reported in the Rule 003 quarterly reports.
- (3) RSPs that are both regulated rate providers and default supply providers have the option of submitting two Rule 003 quarterly reports each quarter, one for electricity and one for gas, or providing one combined Rule 003 quarterly report but keeping separate raw data for each service as backup, in order to be able to provide the data to the Commission upon request.

2.2 Rule 003 annual report

- (1) The Rule 003 annual report shall be submitted to the Commission no later than the last day of February following the end of the calendar year.
- (2) RSPs that are both regulated rate providers and default supply providers have the option of submitting two Rule 003 annual reports each year, one for electricity and one for gas, or providing one combined Rule 003 annual report but keeping separate raw data for each service as backup, in order to be able to provide the data to the Commission upon request.
- (3) The Rule 003 annual report shall consist of an accumulation of the quantitative data reported in the Rule 003 quarterly reports, additional annual metrics and qualitative information required for explaining trends, corrective action plans and reasons for variances from standards.
- (4) Whenever the minimum performance standards set out in Section 3 are not met by an RSP, the reasons for failing to meet the standard and the corrective actions taken must be explained in the Rule 003 annual report.

If the Commission is satisfied that exceptional circumstances existed, the Commission may waive any applicable performance standard in the event of a failure to meet that standard. The burden shall be on the RSP to demonstrate that its level of preparedness and response was reasonable in light of the circumstances surrounding the failure to meet the standard.

2.3 Annual meeting

After submission of the Rule 003 annual report to the Commission, the RSP and the Commission will meet at least once annually to discuss service quality issues, trends in service quality data reported by the RSP, including any corrective action plans proposed by the RSP to remedy failing performance standards, issues raised by customer complaints filed with the Commission, and other policy issues relating to customer service. Meetings may occur more frequently at the Commission's discretion.

2.4 Templates for Rule 003 quarterly reports and Rule 003 annual reports

- (1) The templates (and instructions for completion) for reporting performance results to the Commission are available on the Rule 003 website at www.auc.ab.ca.
- (2) In order to allow the Rule 003 annual report to accumulate the data provided in the Rule 003 quarterly reports, the RSP must enter data for the second, third and fourth quarter Rule 003 quarterly reports in the same copy of the template used by the RSP for the previous quarter(s).
- (3) Quantitative data and graphical depiction of the data are the outputs of the templates.
- (4) Qualitative explanations as required by this rule for the Rule 003 annual report are considered part of the Rule 003 annual report but are not included as part of the templates. A letter or Microsoft Word document containing the required qualitative information for the Rule 003 annual report must accompany the quantitative data and graphical depiction of the data that are outputs from the templates.

2.5 Backups and missing data

- (1) The RSP must retain any documentation that is required as backup for the Rule 003 quarterly reports and the Rule 003 annual reports for not less than 24 months after the results are reported. The RSP must provide these reports to the Commission upon request.
- (2) The RSP must report missing data or other events that could reasonably affect the quality of the data immediately after becoming aware of the missing data or events.

3 Performance categories and standards

This section establishes the performance categories and, where applicable, the standards to be met by RSPs and outlines the information required by the Commission for it to accomplish its regulatory function with respect to service quality standards as provided for under this rule. Unless specifically identified as being only reported in the Rule 003 annual report, metrics identified as required in this Rule 003 are required to be reported in each of the Rule 003 quarterly reports and the Rule 003 annual report.

3.1 Call answer performance measures

This category focuses on metrics related to the monthly performance of the call centre, established or outsourced by the RSP, which handles calls from RSP customers by the RSP's customer service representatives (RSP representative). For those RSPs that do not maintain separate phone numbers and, therefore, separate call statistics for their RSP-related call answering, distinct from call answering related to other services they may provide, the RSPs shall provide the combined call answer metrics and clearly note in the Rule 003 annual report the various services that are included in the call answer statistics.

In measuring call answer performance, this Rule 003 does not measure performance related to customers who call the RSP and obtain the information they require from the RSP's interactive voice response (IVR) system. Rather, calls to be measured by this metric are those calls that are transferred by the IVR to the RSP's call centre automated call distribution (ACD).

3.1.1 Call answering service level

This measure tracks the percentage of customer calls answered by an RSP representative that are answered within 30 seconds. The data includes only those calls transferred from the IVR to the call centre ACD and answered by an RSP representative. The measure is to be calculated as a monthly average, as follows:

$$\frac{\text{Number of calls reaching an RSP representative within 30 seconds}}{\text{Total number of calls reaching an RSP representative}}$$

The minimum performance standard for this measure is 70 per cent.

3.1.2 Abandon rate

This measure tracks the percentage of all callers attempting to reach an RSP representative that hang up after selecting an option through the IVR and after being transferred from the IVR to the call centre ACD. This measure excludes those calls where callers hang up within four seconds of being transferred from the IVR, to account for the callers that may have realized they selected the wrong option from the IVR. The measure is to be calculated as a monthly average, as follows:

Numbers of calls where the caller hangs up after being transferred from the IVR
Total number of calls transferred by the IVR to the ACD

The performance for this category must not exceed five per cent.

3.2 Billing performance measures

The metrics in this category track billing performance as it relates to the normal billing operations of the RSP. Alternatively, when a major billing event occurs at any step in the billing process, the RSP must notify the Commission within one business day of becoming aware of the major billing event. For the purposes of this rule, a major billing event is defined as an unscheduled interruption in the production, printing or delivery of bills to customers lasting at least three business days and affecting 100 per cent of the bills scheduled to be produced, printed or delivered to customers during that time.

The reporting of the number of sites overdue for billing, and for how long, will alert the Commission to situations where the RSP is experiencing difficulties billing some customers that will likely result in customer complaints.

3.2.1 Sites overdue for billing

The RSP shall identify all cases where, as of the end of the quarter being reported in the Rule 003 quarterly report, the RSP has received TBF charges (see Rule 004: *Alberta Tariff Billing Code Rules*) for a site, but a customer has not been billed those charges for more than one month (outstanding TBF charges).

The RSP shall report the number and percentage of sites with outstanding TBF charges. When there are multiple months of outstanding TBF charges for the same site, the RSP shall count the site only once in the metric and report how long it has been since the oldest outstanding TBF charges were received relative to the end of the quarter.

For example, if an RSP last billed a site on December 31, 2009, but has since received TBF charges on January 20, February 20 and March 20, 2010, and the RSP is preparing the Rule 003 quarterly report for the quarter ending March 31, 2010, the outstanding TBF charges are those received January 20 and February 20, but not March 20 (as the charges received March 20 were received less than a month before the end of the quarter). The site will be counted as overdue for billing since the oldest outstanding TBF charges were received (January 20), a gap of more than two months but less than three prior to March 31.

In addition, the RSP shall separate each of the metrics into the following two categories:

- (a) Sites where the RSP has a customer to bill (customer information available); or
- (b) Sites where the RSP does not have customer information in order to bill (customer information not available).

This statistic is intended to reflect the fact that reasons for not billing tend to be different depending on whether or not customer information is known by the RSP. If customer information is available, not billing the site may be indicative of issues with the billing system or with billing processes. If customer information is not available to the RSP, the RSP is likely not billing for that reason. Ways to address the latter situation have more to do with processes around locating customer names and billing addresses rather than with issues with the billing system. Both are problems, but their impacts and solutions can be very different.

3.3 Customer satisfaction measures

3.3.1 Percentage of customer satisfaction following customer-initiated contact with the RSP (Rule 003 annual report only)

For this measure, the RSP must report the level of customer satisfaction using the results from its internal customer satisfaction survey process or using the results from the survey process of an independent third-party agency. Whether the RSP conducts surveys on an ongoing basis throughout the year or it conducts the survey on an annual basis, the RSP shall report the results as part of the Rule 003 annual report. The RSP must use the sampling methodology described in Appendix A. The survey instrument may be a telephone or online questionnaire using survey questions also listed in Appendix A, as well as any additional questions that the RSP may add.

The minimum performance standard for this customer satisfaction measure is: 75 per cent of customers must agree with the statements about the RSP (see Appendix A).

3.3.2 Overall customer satisfaction measures (Rule 003 annual report only)

The RSP must measure overall customer satisfaction once annually. Using an independent third-party agent or its own internal survey process, the RSP must survey a sample of the RSP's customers to assess general customer satisfaction in the following areas:

- (a) Customer service; and
- (b) Accurate and timely billing.

The RSP (or third-party agent) must use the sampling methodology described in Appendix B. The survey instrument may be a telephone or

online questionnaire using survey questions also listed in Appendix B, as well as any additional questions that the RSP may add.

The minimum performance standard is: 75 per cent of customers must agree with the statements about the RSP (see Appendix B).

3.4 Billing Services

3.4.1 Billing Requirements

- (1) For the purposes of this section, the “permissible disconnection period” means a disconnection that occurs:
 - (a) during the period between April 16 to October 14 of any year for electricity services, or April 15 to October 31 of any year for gas services, and
 - (b) when the temperature will be above 0 degrees Celsius in the 24-hour period after the proposed disconnection;
- (2) An ESP must not issue
 - (a) an incorrect customer bill;
 - (b) a late customer bill;
 - (c) an unexpected customer bill; or
 - (d) more than one customer bill in a calendar month unless it has a reasonable explanation for issuing multiple bills.
- (3) An ESP must not request the disconnection of a customer unless
 - (a) the customer requests the disconnection;
 - (b) the customer’s account is in arrears and the disconnection will occur within the permissible disconnection period;
 - (c) the customer is receiving electricity or gas service but fails to provide information or provides incorrect information for billing purposes and the disconnection will occur within the permissible disconnection period; or
 - (d) the premises or property served by a site reasonably appears to be vacant or unoccupied.
- (4) An ESP must not refer a customer to a credit agency, including a collection agency, unless the customer’s account is in arrears.

- (5) An ESP must not provide written notice of
 - (a) A pending disconnection except for the reasons set out in sections 3.4.1 (3) (b) to (d).
 - (b) A pending referral to a credit agency, including a collection agency, unless the customer's account is in arrears.

3.4.2 Service guarantees

- (1) If the ESP contravenes sections 3.4.1 (3) to 3.4.1 (5), the ESP must provide a credit of \$150 to the affected customer.
- (2) A regulated rate provider or default supply provider shall not include for recovery in a regulated rate tariff application or a default rate tariff application, service guarantee credits of \$150 paid to customers under this section.
- (3) Until the regulated rate provider or default supply provider applies to the Commission to change its terms and conditions of service to incorporate substantively sections 3.4.1(3) to 3.4.1(5), these sections are deemed to be included in its terms and conditions of service as of January 1, 2019.

Appendix A – Customer-initiated contact satisfaction survey

Customer satisfaction survey following customer-initiated contact with the RSP

The focus of this customer-initiated contact satisfaction survey is on residential, farm, irrigation and small commercial customers who have recently contacted their RSP. The survey is limited to customers who contacted the RSP by phone, email or via the RSP's website.

RSPs can choose their own frequency for administering the customer-initiated contact satisfaction survey, but the responses shall be amalgamated throughout the year and reported in the Rule 003 annual report.

The customer-initiated contact satisfaction survey includes a study of customer contacts made with the RSP within, at most, 30 days after the RSP/customer interaction has taken place. The RSP selects a random sample from its database of all customer-initiated contacts. The study must achieve a minimum sample of 400 completed questionnaires each year. The recommended sample size of 400 is designed to have a plus or minus five per cent sampling error at the 95 per cent confidence level.

The RSP must attempt to reach the person who contacted the RSP. Customers who have been surveyed within the past 12 months by the RSP shall be excluded from the survey, as shall customers who earlier indicated that they do not wish to be surveyed. Finally, through a survey question, any customer who has been employed by the RSP within the past two years or whose household contains someone who has been employed by the RSP within the past two years shall not be included in the survey.

The survey must include the following questions:

In light of your recent experience with [*Insert name of RSP*], please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

- (a) [*Insert name of RSP*] makes it easy for customers to reach them.
- (b) [*Insert name of RSP*]'s employees are helpful.
- (c) [*Insert name of RSP*]'s employees are knowledgeable.
- (d) [*Insert name of RSP*]'s employees are courteous.
- (e) [*Insert name of RSP*]'s employees provide satisfactory service.

Appendix B – Overall satisfaction survey

Overall customer satisfaction survey

The focus of this overall satisfaction survey is on residential, farm, irrigation and small commercial customers who are customers of the RSP at the time of the survey. The survey must be administered annually and the results reported in the Rule 003 annual report.

Respondents are chosen randomly from the customer base of the RSP. The study must achieve a minimum sample of 400 completed questionnaires each year. The recommended sample size of 400 is designed to have a plus or minus per cent sampling error at the 95 per cent confidence level.

Customers who have been surveyed within the past 12 months by the RSP shall be excluded from the survey, as shall customers who earlier indicated previously to the RSP that they do not wish to be surveyed. Finally, through a survey question, any customer who has been employed by the RSP within the past two years or whose household contains someone who has been employed by the RSP within the past two years shall not be included in the survey.

The survey must include the following questions:

For each of the following statements about [*Insert name of RSP*], please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the statement:

- (a) [*Insert name of RSP*] sends bills to customers on time.
- (b) [*Insert name of RSP*] sends correct and accurate bills to customers.
- (c) [*Insert name of RSP*] makes its bills easy to understand.
- (d) [*Insert name of RSP*] provides good service to its customers.