Decision 05-04-013 April 7, 2005

BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

James Ahn, Complainant, vs. Southern California Gas Company, Defendant.	(ECP) Case 04-12-011 (Filed December 17, 2004)

OPINION DENYING COMPLAINT

Complainant asserts that his gas bills for his one bedroom apartment are too high based on his usage and compared to the gas bills of the occupants of other apartments in the same building. Defendant denies the complaint. Public hearing was held February 18, 2005.

Complainant testified that for the four years, July 2000 to June 2004, that he has lived in his apartment, his gas bills have totaled approximately $1,400, an average of $40.00 per month. He said that a houseline gas leak found in January 2003 was part of the cause of his high gas bills, but his bills remained high until July 2004, when they dropped and stayed low. He attributes the sharp drop in his gas bills to the fact that he filed a high bill informal complaint with the Commission on June 2004. Complainant said his average bill since July 2004 is about $12 per month, and he requests that Southern California Gas Company's

(SoCalGas) revise his bills since July 2000 using the post-July 2004 average. Complainant seeks an $824 refund.

The SoCalGas witness testified that a SoCalGas field technician was sent to complainant's address on July 20, 2000 to obtain a new account meter read. The technician noted that no leaks were present. On October 26, 2000 another meter inspection was performed; a range, water heater, and wall furnace were serviced. The meter was tested indicating no leaks were present. On November 29, 2000, in response to complainant's high bill complaint, a field technician changed out meter number 00338423 to test it for accuracy. It was found to be accurate. On March 18, 2002, a field technician repaired a small leak in complainant's apartment which was too small to measure. On April 2, 2002, a field technician was again sent to complainant's apartment in response to complainant's report of a gas odor and found no leak. On January 30, 2003, a field technician serviced complainant's range, water heater, and wall furnace. A houseline leak of 1.5 cubic feet per hour was found. Service was shut off at the meter for complainant to have repairs made. A 1.5 cubic foot per hour gas leak would equate to approximately $6.50 per month based on an average CARE Over Baseline rate of $.60 per therm. On January 6, 2004, a field technician serviced complainant's range, water heater, and wall furnace; no leak was found. On March 16, 2004, a field technician serviced complainant's range, water heater, and wall furnace; no leak was found. On March 30, 2004 a field technician was sent to complainant's apartment in response to complainant's report of a gas odor at the range. The technician found that the pilot light was out. He serviced the range. All meter tests showed accurate reads.

The witness said that in reviewing complainant's gas consumption records complainant's usage appears to be normal (usage increases in the winter months and decreases in the summer months) based on his appliances.

It is apparent that complainant has been trying to conserve energy and has recently succeeded, but that does not warrant a refund for prior use. We have reviewed his gas bills from July 2000 to the present and find that they are reasonable given seasonable differences and the appliances in his apartment. As we said in Decision (D.) 92577 (5 CPUC 2d 303), "In a complaint proceeding, it would not be wise or practical policy to require the utility to prove, through whatever devices, that a customer actually did or did not use the energy registered on his meter. To expect a utility to determine the amount of energy used as well as the manner in which it was used would require an unacceptable intrusion into the lives of its customers."

Assignment of Proceeding

Michael R. Peevey is the Assigned Commissioner and Robert Barnett is the assigned ALJ in this proceeding.

O R D E R

IT IS ORDERED that:

1. The relief request is denied.
2. Case 04-12-011 is closed.

This order is effective today.

Dated April 7, 2005, at San Francisco, California.

MICHAEL R. PEEVEY
President
GEOFFREY F. BROWN
SUSAN P. KENNEDY
DIAN M. GRUENEICH
Commissioners