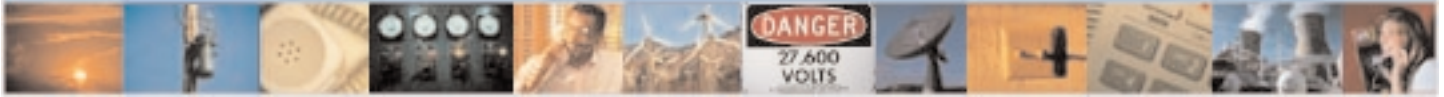




# PUBLIC UTILITY CONNECTION



VOLUME 10, ISSUE 4

MARCH 2009

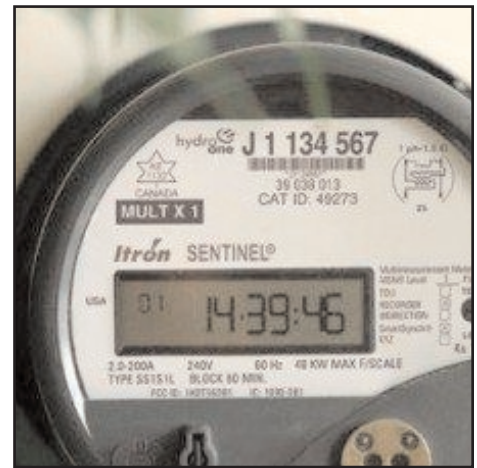
## Smart Meter implementation moves forward

### New technology will offer many customer benefits

Metering technology has evolved substantially over the years. The simple, mechanical meters from yesterday are beginning to be replaced with the digital meter of the future. Smart Meters are serving more and more residential and small business consumers across the country as electric delivery companies make significant progress with deployment. These new meters use digital electronic and communications technologies, which allow them to

process and confirm energy consumption directly through your electric delivery company or Transmission and Distribution Utility (TDU). When fully implemented, this state-of-the-art technology will provide all electricity consumers with a host of new and future benefits.

The most important benefit of Smart Meters is that customer will ultimately have more choice and control over his or her electric usage and bill. Electricity is one of the few commodities left where consumers pay after they use it. Consider cell phones, where you purchase a plan with a specific amount of minutes in a one-month cycle. You know how much your minutes will cost during peak hours, if they are free after hours or on weekends, and at what rate minute overages are charged. There are vir-



tually no usage surprises. Not so with electricity! Fortunately, plans for the new meters include technology that could

See Smart Meters, page 2

### From the Commissioners

## New rules assist in electricity shopping

Dear customer,

It's encouraging to write this letter at a time when energy costs are dramatically lower than they were several months ago. Still, the sharp spikes in electricity prices last spring and summer made us realize changes are needed in the rules governing the Texas retail electric market. We've been working on several rule packages designed to help you better understand your electricity costs and strengthen the financial underpinnings of Texas retail electric providers.

First, we are ordering additional disclosure information by providers. We have established three types of

pricing plans: fixed, variable and indexed. Fixed is just what it says by locking you in to an agreed price for a specified time period. A variable plan changes month-to-month and both current and historical pricing information must always be available to you. An indexed plan pegs your price to a predetermined formula (such as fuel prices) based on information that must be readily available.

Whatever plan you choose, our order requires that all providers give you the opportunity to obtain up-to-date pricing information at all times. Contract renewal notices are now required within an advance notice

window of 14 to 45 days.

Second, we will increase the financial quality of providers by making them meet higher credit and cash requirements if they want to do business in Texas. This includes additional security protections for customer deposits. We will also require more providers to report their financial condition more frequently.

Third, we will improve the process to be known as Emergency Service. Currently called Provider of Last Resort (POLR) service, the changes will result in more competitive prices and more timely notification, along

See New rules, page 2



Smitherman



Nelson



Anderson

# Smart Meters to improve delivery of electricity

Continued from page 1

transform consumers' relationship with electricity from passive to interactive. In the future, the meters will communicate with programmable devices, such as air conditioners, dishwashers, and dryers, to monitor and even control consumption. These "home area network" devices will allow you to turn down your air conditioner if your usage levels are pushing you into a high-consumption, high-cost zone.

An immediate benefit of Smart Meters is the ability to send your total kilowatt hour (kWh) (electrical unit) consumption directly to your electric delivery company remotely. This means that a meter reader will no longer need to come to your home once a month to record the number on the face of your meter. This will result in a reduction of vehicles on the road, thus reducing pollution, traffic, and fuel consumption.

Additionally, if your meter needs to be re-read, your TDU can do that much faster without having to send a meter reader out to your residence or business.

With the new meters, your electricity use will be recorded in 15-minute intervals instead of once a month like the old meters. This

feature has substantial potential, and the ultimate goal is for consumers to be able to access detailed usage information through their electric provider's Web site or bills.

Consumers will be able to see the correlation between consumption and price and make educated adjustments, such as turning their air conditioner setting up during hours that they are not at home.

As meters are installed and enabled, transactions with your electric delivery company will happen faster. Less time will be needed to process service orders, such as starting or stopping your service.

Smart Meters will also provide instant power outage notice to your TDU, supporting more reliable electric delivery to your home.

The future is bright for Smart Meters. As technology advances, the meters will offer many more features that are currently in the developmental stage.

Traditional modes of energy usage are being challenged and the future electric consumer will not only be able to monitor his or her energy usage and cut their electricity costs but make the changes necessary to become smart consumers.

Public Utility Connection  
Customer Protection Division  
Public Utility Commission of Texas  
P.O. Box 13326  
Austin, TX 78711-3326

Editor: Henry Garza

Copy Editor: Henry Garza

Contributors: Henry Garza,  
Kimberly Gilbertson, Steve Hudson

Publication design: Henry Garza

For a free online subscription to this newsletter, please visit

[www.puclist.puc.state.tx.us/scripts/pucsubscribe.asp](http://www.puclist.puc.state.tx.us/scripts/pucsubscribe.asp)

This newsletter may be reproduced, and all articles within may be reproduced and reprinted without permission.

PHONE: 512-936-7000

FAX: 512-936-7003

TTY: 512-936-7136

E-MAIL: [publications@puc.state.tx.us](mailto:publications@puc.state.tx.us)

QUESTIONS OR COMPLAINTS:

1-888-782-8477

WEB SITE: [www.puc.state.tx.us](http://www.puc.state.tx.us)

TEXAS ELECTRIC CHOICE

1-866-PWR-4-TEX (1-866-797-4839)

[www.powertochoose.org](http://www.powertochoose.org)

## New rules to speed process when switching to new provider

Continued from page 1

with adjustments depending on the size of the provider that leaves the Texas market.

In addition, we're working on ways to speed the process when you switch providers. These rules will take effect over the next several months.

We hope these new rules will make your electricity shopping experience easier and encourage you to learn more about the cost in addition to the amount of electricity you use.

And about those lower energy prices we mentioned at the beginning of this letter.

Many electric offers are substantially lower than they were six months ago. Now is a great time to check your electric bill and look for a better value at [www.powertochoose.org](http://www.powertochoose.org) (call 1-866-797-4839 toll-free if you don't have Internet access).

Find a pricing plan that fits your needs as we help you deal with rapidly changing energy prices.

Sincerely,  
Barry T. Smitherman, Chairman  
Donna L. Nelson, Commissioner  
Kenneth W. Anderson, Jr., Commissioner

### Do you have a utility complaint?

To contact the PUC with a complaint:

**Call:** 1-888-782-8477  
In Austin 512-936-7120  
**Se habla español**

**Fax:** 512-936-7003

**Write:** Public Utility  
Commission  
Customer Protection  
P.O. Box 13326  
Austin, TX 78711-3326

**Web:** [www.puc.state.tx.us/ocp](http://www.puc.state.tx.us/ocp)

# Cast of Greater Tuna to reprise PUC PSAs

Joe Sears and Jaston Williams, stars of the Greater Tuna series of stage presentations, will return this summer in new public service announcements for the PUC's Texas Electric Choice campaign.

Sears and Williams starred in the PUC's Telly Award-winning public service announcements in 2005. Those PSAs have been seen by millions of Texans over the past three years. Earlier this year, PUC customer education staff decided to approach the duo about repeating their roles, which use their unique brand of folksy Texas humor to convince consumers to shop around for their retail electric plan.

The new PSAs will be filmed in early April and will be delivered to television and radio stations in areas of retail electric competition for broadcast this summer.

The spots will also encourage consumers to save money through energy efficiency and conservation as well as to consider buying a renewable power plan.

For the fourth consecutive year, the PUC will participate in the Texas Association of Broadcasters' Non-Commercial Sustaining Announcement program, which leverages the media dollars of government agencies and non-profit organizations. The program

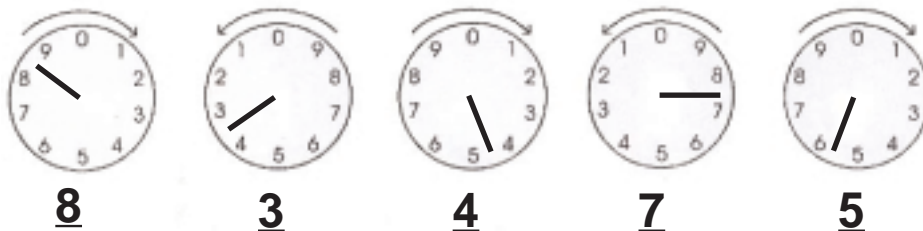


Former Public Utility Commissioner Julie Parsley shares a laugh with Greater Tuna stars Joe Sears, left, and Jaston Williams, right, during production of a public service campaign in 2005. The pair will return this summer in new public service announcements for the PUC's Texas Electric Choice campaign.

guarantees that the PUC's public service announcements will be aired at least three

times more than had the PUC bought paid advertising time to air the PSAs.

## HOW TO READ YOUR ELECTRIC METER



Have you ever wanted to read your electric meter? We can help you do that with these simple instructions.

- Look at your meter. It has five or possibly four dials.
- Some dial hands turn clockwise and some counterclockwise.
- To read your meter, read each dial starting from left and record the number that each hand has just passed and not the number it is approaching.
- On the dials above, you'll see the reading is 83475.
- If you read the meter a month later and the new reading is 84675, the difference of 1200 is the number of kilowatt-hours (kWh) you used between the two readings.



# Discount assists low-income electric customers

The Public Utility Commission (PUC) authorized a discount effective May 2009 through August 2009 for low-income residential electric customers in areas participating in retail electric competition.

Most customers who are eligible for the discount are automatically enrolled through a matching system operated by the Low-Income Discount Administrator (LIDA) using data provided by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) and retail electric providers.

Customers who qualify for the Low-Income Discount but are not automatically matched are encouraged to apply directly by calling 1-866-454-8387 toll-free. In addition, customers who self-enrolled over the past year need to re-enroll. Self-enrolled customers are required to re-enroll every seven months. Every self-enrolled customer should have received an application and information by mail. Customers who have not received this information should call the above toll-free number. The Web site [www.puc.state.tx.us/ocp/assist/liteup/index.cfm](http://www.puc.state.tx.us/ocp/assist/liteup/index.cfm) also contains this

information in both English and Spanish.

Completed applications must be mailed with a copy of the most recent electric bill and income documentation to:

LITE-UP TEXAS

1779 Wells Branch Parkway, Ste. 110B, #320  
Austin, TX 78728-7022

A customer qualifies if family income is at or below 125 percent of federal poverty level guidelines (\$27,563 annually for a family of four), or if the customer receives certain benefits from HHSC, including food stamps or Medicaid.

The customer must have an electric account in an area with retail customer choice. Residents of master or sub-metered apartments cannot get the discount.

The discount does not affect eligibility for any other government benefit.

Funding for the discount comes from the System Benefit Fund.

The fund collects 65 cents per 1,000 kWh from electric customers in areas of retail electric competition within Texas.

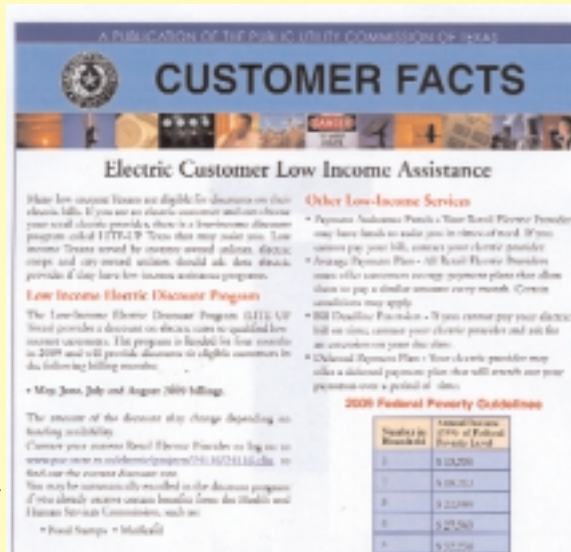
The Information and Education (I&E) section of the PUC's Customer Protection Division has been busy updating all of the Consumer Fact Sheets that we offer to electric and telecommunications customers.

From Advanced Metering to Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), a broad range of subjects are addressed. Since we are committed to giving accurate and complete information, we have been updating all the sheets' facts and figures.

Additionally, we have added new sheets to expand our subject list and keep our customers knowledgeable about current electric and telecommunications topics. To request fact sheets, call us toll free at 1-888-782-8477 or print them off directly from the PUC Publications section of our Web site at [www.puc.state.tx.us/publications/index.cfm](http://www.puc.state.tx.us/publications/index.cfm).

New Fact Sheet Topics:

- Deregulation
- Advanced Metering System
- What are my rights as an Electric Customer?
- Provider of Last Resort
- How do I file a Complaint with the PUC?
- Electric Cramming



## Commission sets 2009 interest rates

Texas electric and telephone customers who are over billed will be paid 3.21 percent interest in 2009 under rates established Monday by the Public Utility Commission (PUC). Customers will receive 2.09 percent interest on utility deposits.

The 3.21 percent rate for over billings is based on the 90-day prime commercial paper rate over the last 12 months.

The 2.09 percent rate for deposit refunds is based on the average yield on 26-week Treasury bills during the past 12 months.

The final order is available on the PUC Web site by going to the filings interchange under control number 35141.

### Quick Energy Tip

Making improvements to your lighting is one of the fastest ways to cut your energy bills. Using new lighting technologies can reduce lighting energy use in your home by 50% to 75%. Advances in lighting controls offer further energy savings by reducing the amount of time lights are on, but not being used.