

About the RCA

The Regulatory Commission of Alaska (RCA) regulates public utilities by certifying qualified providers of public utility and pipeline services and ensuring that they provide safe and adequate services and facilities at just and reasonable rates, terms, and conditions.

HOW THE REGULATORY COMMISSION OF ALASKA BENEFITS THE PUBLIC

- The Commission maintains a website which allows the public to view public notices and submit related comments, view filings made at the Commission, follow Commission action in proceedings, view utility tariffs, and file informal complaints.
- Filings submitted to the Commission such as rate changes and applications are analyzed by technical staff (from the engineering, finance, tariff, or telecommunication sections) and Commissioners to ensure regulatory compliance and to balance the viability of the utility or pipeline service provider with the needs of the consumer.
- The Commission's Consumer Protection and Information Section is available for the public to contact by phone or email or at an outreach event to obtain information, ask questions about a regulated utility's practices, or resolve an issue with a utility. The Consumer Protection and Information Section generally resolves issues promptly and at minimal cost to the consumer.
- The Commission provides an opportunity for individuals to bring concerns to Commissioners' attention by inviting public comment at its regularly scheduled public meetings.
- The Commission may investigate, on its own motion or in response to a formal complaint, the practices of regulated utility and pipeline service providers and the providers' compliance with statutes and regulations, tariffs, and Commission orders. For example, the Commission has been called upon to investigate instances of
 - poor quality of water service
 - financial viability of utilities
 - unsafe electric distribution systems
 - business practices of refuse service providers
 - refusals to provide telephone service.

Five full-time Commissioners are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Legislature for six-year terms. Each year, the RCA elects a Chairman for a one-year term. Upon election, the Chairman assumes responsibility for administrative functions of the RCA, becomes the policy spokesperson, assigns dockets, and coordinates public meeting activities, in addition to shouldering regular commissioner docket work. The Chairman is ultimately responsible for the timeliness of the RCA's adjudication

process, meeting statutory timelines, and serving as the RCA's liaison to the Legislative and the Executive branches of state government.

The RCA's staff includes Administrative Law Judges, engineers, financial analysts, telecommunications specialists, tariff analysts, consumer protection officers, paralegals, administrative and support staff.

PROCESS

As a regulatory decision-making body, the RCA exercises a delegated legislative power. Each regulatory decision is reached quasi-judicially - that is to say, the decision must be based on evidence of record gathered in docketed proceedings. All dockets are closely scheduled, but the due process rights of parties, carefully observed by the RCA, mainly govern their timing. In the course of a hearing, parties participating may include the subject public utility and Regulatory Affairs Public Advocacy section of the Attorney General's Office.

In cases where millions of dollars may be at stake, or important issues of regulatory policy arise, a number of intervenors, representing interests as diverse as low-income customers and large industrial customers, may also participate. They too may employ expert witnesses and attorneys. Intervenors often seek involvement because regulatory decisions distribute outcomes as gains or losses to particular parties. Cases raise issues of law, economics, accounting, finance and engineering that can establish legal precedent for future cases.

Parties present sworn testimony and evidence of expert witnesses on matters at issue. Witnesses may be cross-examined by the attorneys representing each party. Reaching decisions, which consider the often competing interests of concerned parties, in pursuit of outcomes which protect and promote the overall public interest, is one way to view the RCA's role. Each decision, which can be appealed to state or federal court, must be supported by the evidentiary record and applicable laws and regulations.

WHEN DO WE NEED THE REGULATORY COMMISSION OF ALASKA?

In most cases, when utilities request changes in either their rates or types of services they provide, the RCA provides notice to the public and allows thirty days for comments. The RCA then acts to approve or disapprove

the utility's proposal. Public notices appear as advertisements in the local newspaper or are otherwise distributed or published as our statutes or regulations require. Some notices are also provided directly by the utilities in the form of flyers mailed with utility bills.

WHOM DOES THE REGULATORY COMMISSION OF ALASKA REGULATE?

Most entities providing telecommunications, electric, natural gas, water, sewer, garbage, or steam services to ten or more customers are required to have a certificate to operate. A public utility or pipeline carrier must obtain a certificate of public convenience and necessity, which describes the authorized service area and scope of operations of the utility. A certificate may be issued when the RCA finds the applicant to be fit, willing, and able to provide the service.

The RCA regulates the rates, services, and practices of utilities that meet the criteria for a certificate of public convenience and necessity to provide service to the public for compensation. However, there are utilities that are not economically regulated; these include local, government-owned utilities, very small utilities, cable television providers, cellular phone service, and cooperatives whose members have voted to become deregulated. The RCA also regulates oil and gas pipeline carriers that operate within Alaska.