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UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

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June 29, 2022

Ms. Amanda Maxwell
Executive Director and Secretary
Utilities and Transportation Commission
P.O. Box 47250
Olympia, WA 98504-7250

Re: Cascade Natural Gas Customer Service Quality report
Docket UG-061721

Dear Amanda Maxwell:

On February 18, 2022, Cascade Natural Gas (CNG) submitted its annual customer service quality report for the 12-month period ending December 31, 2021.

Final Order 06 in docket UG-061721 established CNG’s customer service reporting program. The program was part of the settlement agreement reached during the MDU Resources merger. Order 06 requires CNG report certain metrics annually. Order 06 and the settlement agreement did not set performance targets.

Consumer Complaints

Cascade is to report the number of complaints it receives from consumers as well as complaints it received from the commission. The number of complaints received by CNG decreased in 2021, in follow up questions CNG indicated that the decline is likely because many complaints are due to disconnections for non-payment, which ended in March of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and continued until September 30, 2021.

Number of complaints				
Origin	2018	2019	2020	2021
Received by Cascade	267	323	175	132
Filed with the Commission	8	3	7	5

Natural Gas Emergency Response Time

The average time from a customer call to the arrival of field technicians in response to a natural gas emergency was 46 minutes and 13 seconds, which is a significant increase from the 31 minutes and 13 seconds response time reported for 2020. CNG states the response times in 2021 represent a rebound from the sharp decrease seen in CNG’s 2020 report. The 2021 average response time of 46 minutes and 13 seconds is in line with historical customer service reports submitted by CNG for 2018 and 2019.

Service Appointments

Cascade reports zero missed service appointments for 2021.

Disconnections for Non-payment

The percent of customers disconnected for non-payment was 0.09 percent for residential customers, and 0.14 percent for commercial customers. The percent of customers disconnected for non-payment is significantly lower in this report than prior reports. The decline is likely due to the moratorium on disconnections for non-payment that was issued in Governor Proclamation 20-23 on March 24, 2020, and expired September 30, 2021.

Calls Answered by Live Representative

Cascade also reports the percent of calls answered by a live representative within specific time frames. The percent of calls answered in 40, 50, and 60 seconds is lower than prior years. Staff believes it is likely the company's response to the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact these results. Nevertheless, the decline is a concern and Staff will continue to monitor these numbers in future reports.

In response to follow up questions about longer answer times in conjunction with decreased call volumes, CNG points to two key factors for decreasing answer times. CNG reports it experienced substantial turn over with the Customer Service team in 2021. Staff turnover means newer, less experienced representatives are answering customer calls which may take longer while they navigate the system, answer consumer questions, and find the information they need to complete a call. In addition to increased staff turnover, CNG implemented the Great Heart assistance program in docket UG-210145 as required in docket U-200281. CNG representatives conducted in-house screenings for financial assistance, leading to more time spent on individual calls, thus a decrease in the percentage of calls answered at 40,50, and 60 second intervals described below. ¹

Percent of calls answered by a live representative (including abandoned calls)				
Time	2018 Percent	2019 Percent	2020 Percent	2021 Percent
60 Seconds	79.92	75.79	67.44	53.33
50 Seconds	77.74	72.53	62.34	47.84
40 Seconds	76.35	71.08	61.13	46.10
Total Calls	268,167	261,985	253,365	253,121

¹ This 2021 compliance letter corrects information submitted for the 2018, 2019, and 2020 annual customer service reports in docket UG-061721. In conversations with Cascade Natural Gas (CNG) it was determined previous reports used varying criteria to calculate the total number of calls received each year. CNG provided corrected data for 2018 through 2020 via email. Going forward, the total calls metric will be calculated as calls received by the Interactive Voice Response system (IVR) that were answered by a live representative, plus any calls abandoned before a representative could speak with them. In addition to the total number of calls received each year, Cascade Natural Gas Company will report the percentage of total calls answered by a live representative within 40, 50, and 60 seconds.

Amanda Maxwell

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Conclusion

Commission staff believe CNG complied with the customer service quality reporting stipulations as adopted in Order 06 in docket UG-061721. Staff will continue to monitor Cascade's customer service quality reports, including call center performance.

Sincerely,

Andrew Sellards

Regulatory Analyst, Consumer Protection