



STATE OF WASHINGTON
UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

621 Woodland Square Loop S.E. • Lacey, Washington 98503

P.O. Box 47250 • Olympia, Washington 98504-7250

(360) 664-1160 • TTY 1-800-833-6384 or 711

May 12, 2023

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 March 20, 2023, Cascade Natural Gas (CNG) submitted its annual customer service quality report for the 12-month period ending December 31, 2022.

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 to report certain metrics annually, however, Order 06 and the settlement agreement did not set specific performance targets.

Consumer Complaints

Cascade is to report the number of complaints it receives from consumers that are investigated by CNG staff, as well as consumer complaints the company received from the commission. In 2022, CNG reports it received 173 consumer complaints, with three additional complaints referred from the Commission.

When asked about the increased complaints received by CNG in 2022, CNG staff indicated 173 complaints is more aligned with historical reporting and the 132 complaints received in 2021 is an anomaly. When asked about what is driving the complaints received by CNG, representatives could not identify any specific factors or causes leading to increased complaints received by its staff. Although CNG saw an increase in complaints, CNG suggests that the repeated decrease in complaints filed with the Commission, is an indicator that CNG is effectively addressing consumer concerns negating the need to contact the Commission to submit an informal complaint.

Number of Complaints				
Origin	2019	2020	2021	2022
Received by Cascade	323	175	132	173
Filed with the Commission	3	7	5	3

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 36 minutes and 50 seconds, which is a slight improvement on emergency response times reported in 2021 at 37 minutes and 52 seconds.

Natural Gas Emergency Response Time				
Year	2019	2020	2021*	2022
Response Time	43 Minutes 8 Seconds	31 Minutes 13 Seconds	37 Minutes 52 Seconds	36 Minutes 50 Seconds

*CNG states the 2021 annual report listed an emergency response time of 46 minutes and 13 seconds. In follow-up discussions with CNG, it has been determined the previously reported time of 46 minutes and 13 seconds as reported last year is incorrect due to a data collection issue which has been corrected in this report.

Service Appointments

Cascade reports one missed service appointment for 2022. CNG states the missed appointment occurred April 22, 2022, and was due to an error by a customer service representative who entered the customer's preferred appointment date incorrectly in the system. CNG reports the order was rescheduled and completed the following business day on April 25, 2022.

Disconnections for Non-payment

The percentage of customers disconnected for non-payment in 2022 was 0.71 percent for residential customers, and 0.66 percent for commercial customers.

Disconnection Percentages for Non-Payment				
Year	2019	2020	2021	2022
Residential	1.55%	0.14%	0.09%	0.71%
Commercial	1.37%	0.11%	0.14%	0.66%

The percentage of customers disconnected for non-payment is significantly higher in this report than the 2021 report due to the moratorium on non-payment disconnections elapsing in October 2021. From October 2021 through March 2022, CNG had to obtain permission from the Commission to disconnect service due to non-payment. After March 2022, CNG could disconnect customers without Commission intervention.

Calls Answered by Live Representative

Cascade also reports the percentage of calls answered by a live representative within specific time frames. The percentage of calls answered in 40, 50, and 60 seconds continues to decrease year over year.

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In follow up conversations with the company, CNG points to employee retention issues beginning with the COVID-19 pandemic in April 2020, lasting until early 2022.

In early 2022, CNG hired numerous Customer Service Representatives (CSR) to adequately staff the call center. CNG has provided additional data indicating that call answer times began to improve beginning in July 2022, and continued to improve throughout the rest of 2022, into 2023. Staff is cautiously optimistic that call center response times will continue to improve and looks forward to reviewing call answer times in the full 2023 report.

Percentage of calls answered by a live representative (Including abandoned calls)				
Time	2019 Percent	2020 Percent	2021 Percent	2022 Percent
60 Seconds	75.79	67.44	53.33	52.54
50 Seconds	72.53	62.34	47.84	42.99
40 Seconds	71.08	61.13	46.10	41.48
Total calls	261,985	253,365	253,121	279,292

Conclusion

Commission staff reviewed the compliance filing and believe CNG is in compliance with the customer service quality program 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