

## SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER

[http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/local/263141\\_psefollow16.html](http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/local/263141_psefollow16.html)

### PSE halts sharing of data on its customers

Utility company reviewing practice amid inquiry

Thursday, March 16, 2006

By **CANDACE HECKMAN**  
P-I REPORTER

Puget Sound Energy has suspended its practice of transferring new customers and their information to a Georgia-based marketing company.

Company officials said Wednesday that they would stop the program, at least temporarily, so that they could review it to make sure it properly serves consumers and complies with state regulations.

The state Utilities and Transportation Commission is also reviewing the program, which is referred to locally as PSE Connections.

PSE has offered the service to consumers for about five years. When new residents call the utility to hook up electric or gas service, typically, the PSE customer service representative would offer to also get other services, such as telephone or cable, hooked up as well.

If consumers agreed, the program, PSE Connections, would then take over and telephone reps from Allconnect, the Georgia company that runs PSE Connections, would start those services on consumers' behalf. During the handoff, PSE customer information would be transferred to Allconnect.

Allconnect also marketed other products and services to the customers, such as newspaper subscriptions, pest control and security-alarm service.

About five months ago, however, PSE call center employees said that they were asked to begin transferring nearly all new or service-transfer calls to Allconnect, without asking consumers directly whether they would like to be transferred.

The new protocol was to tell consumers to hold for a confirmation number, which would be given by an Allconnect agent, who would then market other services to the consumer.

Call center employees said the confirmation process was unnecessary and that they were uncomfortable with the new direction.

Washington regulations prohibit electric utilities from sharing customer-identifying information for marketing purposes, such as names and addresses, with anyone, including the utility's own subsidiaries and affiliates.

State regulators sent a letter to PSE last week inquiring about the program and the utility's relationship with Allconnect.

Allconnect provides similar services to at least 20 other electric and gas utilities.

---

*P-I reporter Candace Heckman can be reached at 206-448-8348 or [candaceheckman@seattlepi.com](mailto:candaceheckman@seattlepi.com).*

**© 1998-2006 Seattle Post-Intelligencer**