

Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC)
PUBLIC HEARING ON PROPOSED POLICY
GOVERNING DISPUTES FOR UNPAID WATER/SEWER BILLS

On February 13, 2012, from 3pm-5pm, the WSSC will hold a Public Meeting at their headquarters at 14501 Sweitzer Lane in Laurel, MD to hear comments from customers regarding the proposed policy for disputing unpaid water/sewer bills. Copies of the proposed policy will be available at the One Stop Shop located in the Lobby Level, as well as on the intranet at www.wsscwater.com, under Hot Topics.

STANDARD PROCEDURES OF THE WASHINGTON SUBURBAN SANITARY COMMISSION

ORIGINATOR & POSITION DERRICK PHILLIPS ACTING TEAM CHIEF, CUSTOMER CARE	SP NUMBER CUS 12-__ SUPERSEDES SP CUS 94-01	APPROVE BY/DATE COMMISSION	EFFECTIVE DATE 	PAGE 1 OF 3
---	---	--	-------------------------------	----------------------------------

SUBJECT: RESOLVING CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS: UNPAID WATER/SEWER BILLS

I. PURPOSE

To set forth the procedure for disputing an unpaid water and/or sewer bill to the Dispute Resolving Board.

II. THE DISPUTE RESOLVING BOARD

- A. Composition: The Dispute Resolving Board (DRB) shall consist of two customer members and one employee member. Two panels of the Dispute Resolving Board shall be appointed.
- B. Employee Members: The employee member of each panel of the DRB must hold the position of Unit Coordinator or above (or equivalent grade). Employee members of the DRB may not work in the Customer Care Team. The Customer Relations Group will solicit volunteers for the employee member of each panel, and the General Manager shall make the appointments. The term for each employee member shall be two years. The General Manager may appoint up to two alternate employee members.
- C. Customer Members: The Customer Relations Group will solicit volunteers for the customer members from WSSC's Customer Advisory Board (CAB) or, if necessary, from the general public. The General Manager shall appoint a minimum of four customer members. The term of each customer member shall be two years. The General Manager may appoint up to two alternate customer members.
- D. Training: Each member of the DRB must complete a training program regarding WSSC's billing and adjustment procedures prior to ruling on any DRB claims.

III. PROCEDURE

- A. Initial Notification to WSSC: A customer who is dissatisfied with an unpaid water and/or sewer bill must first contact WSSC. Customer Relations Group staff will review the bill and determine whether the bill is eligible for any reduction based upon WSSC approved policies and procedures. The Customer Relations Group Leader shall notify the customer of the final decision by letter.

-
- B. Initiating the DRB Process: If the customer is dissatisfied with the final decision of the Customer Relations Group, the customer may complete and submit a “Dispute Resolving Board Request Form.” The form and any supporting documentation should be sent to the WSSC Customer Relations Group by mail to 14501 Sweitzer Lane, 10th Floor, Laurel, Maryland, 20707; or by e-mail to cust-relations@wsscwater.com; or by fax to 301-206-7013.
- C. Eligibility for DRB Review:
1. Time Requirements: In order to be eligible for review by the DRB, the customer must make the notification to WSSC required by Section III.A of this procedure within 60 days of the meter reading date upon which the bill is based. In addition, WSSC must receive the customer’s completed “Dispute Resolving Board Request Form” within 30 days of the date of the letter sent by the Customer Relations Group Leader notifying the customer of its final decision regarding the disputed bill.
 2. Repeat Filers: If a customer has filed two requests for DRB review on the same account within the past 24 months and both requests were denied by the DRB, then the customer shall not be eligible for further DRB review. The customer must pay the disputed bill(s) and may file a refund claim in accordance with Maryland Code Annotated, Public Utilities Article, § 25-106.
- D. WSSC Staff Response: Upon receipt of a timely filed “Dispute Resolving Board Request Form”, the Customer Relations Group staff shall prepare a response and shall forward the “Dispute Resolving Board Request Form” and response to the DRB for review and a decision.
- E. DRB Meetings: The DRB shall meet monthly, or as needed based on the case load, at a regularly scheduled time and place, as determined by the DRB. DRB members who are unable to attend the meeting in person may participate by telephone. The DRB will review the disputed bill claims and issue a written decision. No hearing is required, however, the DRB may decide to hold an informal hearing to gather facts that may assist them in deciding the claim. If the DRB decides to hold an informal hearing, Customer Relations Group staff shall coordinate the scheduling of the hearing and notify the customer. The customer may be represented at the hearing by anyone of his or her choosing, and a representative of the Customer Relations Group shall also attend. The DRB hearing is an informal conciliatory process and shall not be construed or conducted as a contested case or adjudicatory hearing under the Maryland Administrative Procedures Act. The hearing shall not be recorded.
- F. Suspension of Collection Efforts: Upon receipt of the “Dispute Resolving Board Request Form,” WSSC will suspend collection efforts on the disputed bill until the DRB issues its decision. All other billed water and/or sewer charges must be paid when due.

- G. Adherence to Policies: In reaching its decision, the DRB shall follow applicable WSSC approved policies and procedures, including Standard Procedure (SP) CUS 10-01 “Adjustment and Correction of Water/Sewer Bills”, SP CUS 99-02 “Billing and Collecting Water/Sewer Use Charges and Related Fees”, or any other approved policy (including subsequent amendments to the two aforementioned policies) that is applicable to the matter. The DRB may only grant adjustments that are authorized by approved WSSC policies and procedures.
- H. Final WSSC Decision: The DRB’s decision shall be the final WSSC decision on unpaid water and/or sewer bill claims.
- I. Payment After Decision: Following the DRB’s decision, the customer shall have 10 days to pay the bill. Failure to do so may result in service being terminated for non-payment in accord with approved WSSC policy concerning suspension of service.
- J. Refund Claims: Customers who wish to pursue a disputed bill claim further may pay the disputed bill and file a claim for a refund in accordance with Maryland Annotated Code, Public Utilities Article, § 25-106.

IV. AUTHORITY CLAUSE:

The General Counsel certifies that the statutory authority for the adoption of this Standard Procedure is the Maryland Annotated Code, Public Utilities Article, Section 17-403.