

Media Release

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Consumer group says AGL should halt disconnections

The Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre (CUAC) today called on AGL to halt all electricity disconnections for non-payment until it can give an undertaking that its billing systems are working and it is complying with regulations.

Following release of a damning audit report by the Essential Services Commission (ESC), CUAC's Executive Officer Jo Benvenuti said that "unless AGL can give the Victorian public reassurance that its systems are working accurately, consumers should be given the benefit of the doubt and remain on supply."

"Not one more Victorian customer who is experiencing hardship should be disconnected," she said.

"The Energy Retail Code exists to ensure that energy retailers delivering these services maintain minimum standards of delivery. In particular, hardship regulations are critical safeguards that should ensure that consumers are not disconnected from essential services as a result of payment difficulty.

"It is very serious that AGL failed 12 of the 13 hardship compliance standards set by the ESC in this audit, as these standards are there to protect the most vulnerable," said Ms. Benvenuti.

CUAC supports the actions taken by the ESC in auditing and exposing AGL's poor performance, which has included systemic billing issues. While the ESC has put AGL on notice by requiring a monthly reporting process until its performance is back on track, CUAC is still concerned about any hardship Victorian consumers may experience in the meantime.

Ms Benvenuti said "CUAC will be monitoring AGL's performance in the coming months and looking for a major improvement. They have had sufficient time to fix these problems and need to take their obligations seriously.

"This is an example of why rigorous consumer protections and regulatory enforcement are of vital importance in essential services."

CUAC urges all consumers with payment difficulties that they cannot fix by direct contact with AGL, to contact the Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria) on 1800 500 509.



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The Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre is an independent consumer advocacy agency which aims to ensure the interests of Victorian consumers, especially low-income, disadvantaged, rural and regional and indigenous consumers, are effectively represented in the policy and regulatory debate on electricity, gas and water.

CUAC believes:

- All Victorians have a right to affordable and sustainable electricity, gas and water;
- All Victorians have a right to have their interests heard in policy and regulatory decisions on electricity, gas and water; and
- All Victorians have a right to not be disconnected from electricity, gas and water due solely to an inability to pay.

For further information please contact CUAC Executive Officer Jo Benvenuti on 0408 896 044.

The ***Summary Audit Report: Regulatory Audit of AGL Energy Ltd. August 2009*** is available at <http://www.esc.vic.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/33015970-4F89-425D-AC87-211191056A07/0/RPTSummaryAuditReportAGL200907092.pdf>