



Consumer Complaints and Compliance Investigations

Commission staff may contact regulated companies to respond to consumer complaints or commission data requests about business practices. This fact sheet explains the commission’s processes and how to avoid violations and financial penalties.

The commission’s consumer protection section receives and resolves complaints from individual consumers about regulated companies and investigates specific issues that could affect multiple consumers. If a staff investigation reveals violations of commission rules, staff will provide detailed instructions about how to comply.

If a company has already received this assistance but failed to implement staff’s recommendations, the company could face penalties or other enforcement actions.

Stay in Compliance

- The commission needs up-to-date contact information for staff responsible for handling commission inquiries.
- Company staff should respond quickly, gather documents and information, and answer questions.
- Respond to requests on time. If you cannot respond by the deadline, you must request an extension.
- Submit complete responses. If staff requests are unclear, ask for clarification.
- If you realize that your conduct violated commission rules, it is best to acknowledge and self-report it.



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Consumer complaints and compliance investigations

Consumer Complaints

Consumers file complaints on the commission website or by calling our consumer protection helpline. When the commission receives a complaint, our consumer protection specialists gather necessary information from the consumer and then pass the complaint to the company via email.

Once a complaint is resolved, the investigator will notify the company of findings and the final disposition of the investigation:

Response Times

Rules governing company response times are listed in the Washington Administrative Code and do not include the day the complaint is passed to the company.

Solid waste companies:

WAC 480-70-386

Telecommunications companies:

WAC 480-120-166

Household goods moving companies:

WAC 480-15-890

Gas and electric companies:

WACs 480-90-173 and 480-100-173

Auto transportation companies:

WAC 480-30-461

Company upheld – Staff found the company acted properly with respect to the consumer’s issues, and no other violations were recorded.

Company upheld with arrangements – Staff found the company acted properly with respect to the consumer’s issues and went beyond requirements to resolve the issue.

Company upheld with violations – Staff found the company acted properly with respect to the consumer’s issues, but other unrelated violations were recorded.

Company upheld with violations and arrangements – Staff found the company acted properly with respect to the consumer’s issues, but other unrelated violations were recorded. The company went beyond requirements to resolve the issue.

Consumer upheld – Staff found the company’s actions were improper, and the consumer’s position is upheld. If staff records violations in the complaint record, staff will notify the company that future violations may result in enforcement action, including penalties. If violations are recurring, egregious, or impact a substantial number of customers, the issue may be

referred to a commission compliance investigator.

Compliance Investigations

If broader investigations are necessary, companies will receive data requests signed by the commission executive director. Companies have two weeks to respond to the request or ask for an extension. If companies have received technical assistance in the past or if the first-time offence is critical to safe operations and consumer protection, staff may recommend the commission issue a penalty or file a formal complaint.

Penalty assessments do not require an administrative hearing and may result in a \$100 penalty per violation. Formal complaints require an administrative proceeding before the commission and may result in penalties up to \$1,000 per violation. Companies operating without a commission permit may be penalized up to \$10,000.

