

UTILITY HORROR TALES

The following stories are just two of the more horrific tales from the company files. During the past years, we have seen utility companies and city-operated utilities misread, misbill, misplace, miscalculate, mistake, miscount, misconstrue, misprint, misinform, misguide and mismanage - causing untold numbers of utility customers misery. The sad thing about it is the fact that it is the norm!

THE PHANTOM WATER METER . . .

The first tale begins with an innocent association that paid it's utility bills, including ten water bills, each month for years and years. These folks knew that if they did not pay these bills each month, their water, gas, electricity, trash or telephone service would be discontinued. However, they, like so many other associations, did not really understand how to read or interpret these monthly utility bills. When one board member tried to located all of the water meters in his free time, he could never seem to locate one or two of them, and never could



Pacific Utility Audit, Inc. got back all of the association's money for a phantom water meter . . . since the account was established!

figure out what the others that he did find served! When he tried to call the utility company to help him find these meters, they told him the meter reader would call him back, which never happened. Or, they gave him directions that could have been for water meters on another planet! He finally gave up, a new board was elected and everybody forgot about the missing water meters and the mysterious utility bills for another few years.

Then, as the utility rates began to increase and increase and increase, this association decided to have a utility audit performed by professionals that did nothing but decipher those mysterious utility bills and locate those hard to find meters and deal with those impossible utility companies. To the association's amazement, they found out that they had been paying for a water

meter that was buried three feet underground and had never been turned on at the valve! "But," they exclaimed, "how could the water company put meter readings on our bills each month for years and years if they never read the meter?" "Well", Pacific Utility Audit said, "the water company decided they would average your other nine water meter consumptions each month and use that average for the water meter consumption for that tenth water meter that they could never locate!"

Of course, the good news is that what this water company had done was hardly legal, and Pacific Utility Audit got back all of the association's money since the date that water account was established, plus accrued interest!

THE LOST REFUND . . .

The next tale begins with another association, but one that had a board member that "knew all about utility bills," so less innocent than the first tale victim. This makes the tale even more horrible and grim, because if it can happen to this association, it can happen to any association!

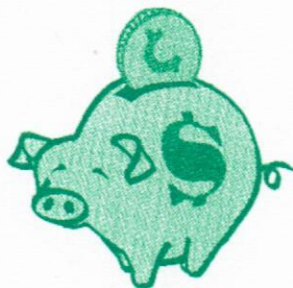
The board member who "knew all about utility bills" had discovered, by himself, that the association was paying sewer service charges on a dedicated irrigation meter. He had spent all of his free time deciphering the association's water bills due to the drought and subsequent increase in water and sewer rates. After hours of toil and trouble and lots of high telephone bills from talking to the utility company, he had convinced the utility company to correct the sewer service charges. Then, after more hours and hours of screaming, yelling and composing demand letters, he had convinced the utility company to issue a credit for one years' worth of overcharges. When this credit was finally received, he allowed the association's board to hire a utility



This association had a board member that "knew all about utility bills".

auditing company, since he was confident that he had done everything he could for the association at no cost to them.

In actuality, he had cost the association 17 years' worth of sewer service overcharges because he had accepted the utility company's one year refund instead of demanding a refund for all 18 years! He did not know that the utility was lying when it told him it could only issue a one year refund due to its "Rules and Regulations" or its "Policies and Procedures." He did not know that by accepting a one year refund from the utility, he had legally forfeited the association's claim to the remaining 17 years of overcharges!



Take your association's money back from the utility companies!

In addition, he had neglected to also audit the association's other utilities. Pacific Utility Audit also discovered that the association had been paying for an electric meter located across the street in an apartment complex, and for 30 trash bins instead of 23 trash bins, which is all they had! Fortunately for this association, we did not accept the utility company's generous offers of one-year refunds for these errors. Pacific Utility Audit obtained the full 18 years' worth of overcharges plus accrued interest for both of these additional utility errors for the association. Surprisingly, the board member who "knew all about utility bills" resigned from the board and was never heard from again.

Needless to say, these are just two of the hundreds of horror stories that have taken place over the last several years. It is terrifying to think that utilities are usually an association's largest budget item each year, yet these kinds of overcharges occur on an ongoing basis. Fortunately, there is help in the form of Pacific Utility Audit.