

# MONTANA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION



*Consumer Assistance Program*

*2013 Annual Review*

The Consumer Assistance Program is within the Legal Division of the Montana Public Service Commission. The program consists of one program manager, one consumer representative, and one half-time compliance specialist.

In 2013, the toll-free complaint line had 5,312 incoming calls. Consumers were also able to contact our office through the following means and frequencies:

- 109 online complaints through the PSC website;
- 22 direct e-mail complaints to a staff person;
- 71 US Postal Service complaints;
- 5 walk-in complaints; and,
- An indeterminate number of complaints received by either the PSC's non-toll-free complaint number or the PSC's main phone number. (The PSC has no way to monitor how many of these calls are received.)

Of the 5,519 documented contacts made to this office through the end of December, 1,011 resulted in complaints being entered into the tracking database. 563 concerned energy (145 dealt with requests from NWE to proceed with disconnect because of a noted medical exception); 287 concerned telecommunications; 156 were miscellaneous; and five were water/sewer.

The Consumer Assistance Program has a number of contingencies for processing a complaint based on the circumstances of the issue. If staff contacts a utility company to attempt resolution of a consumer's issue, the matter is entered into our tracking database and is considered a complaint for reporting purposes. When an inquiry comes in that doesn't require utility company contact but does require research and response, it is entered into the database as a "miscellaneous" contact for tracking purposes. Inquiries that can be answered without utility contact or research are not entered into the tracking database.

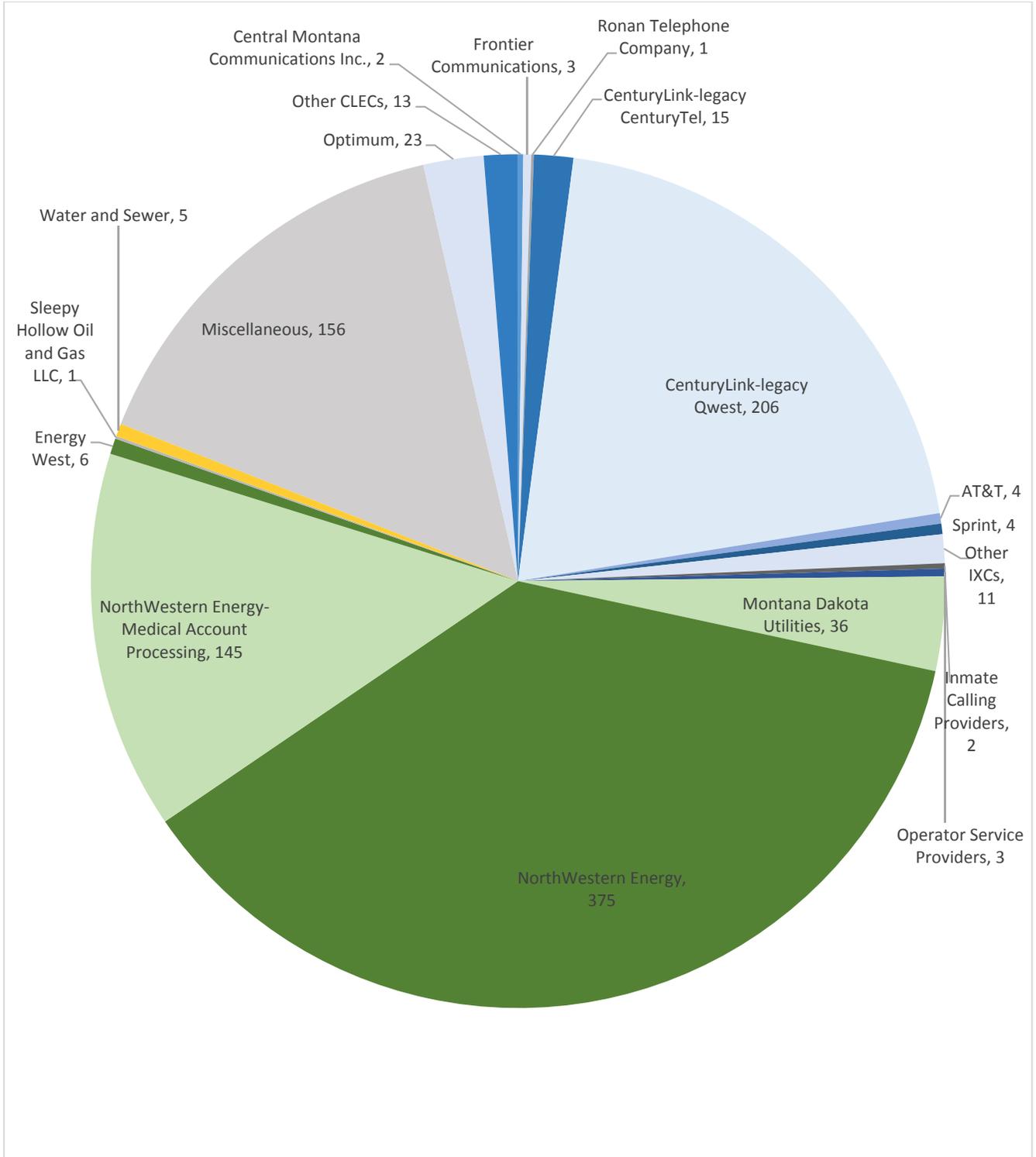
In addition to processing complaints and inquiries received by the PSC, Consumer Assistance Program staff also participate in following tasks:

- Provide input on formal consumer dockets;
- Monitor National Regulatory Research Institute (NRRI) teleseminars;
- Observe National Exchange Carrier Association (NECA) webcasts;
- Participate in State National Action Plan (SNAP) conference calls and meetings;
- Attend National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC) conference calls and meetings;
- Contribute to boards and committees impacting utility consumers; and,
- Follow changes in utility consumer law at both the state and federal level.

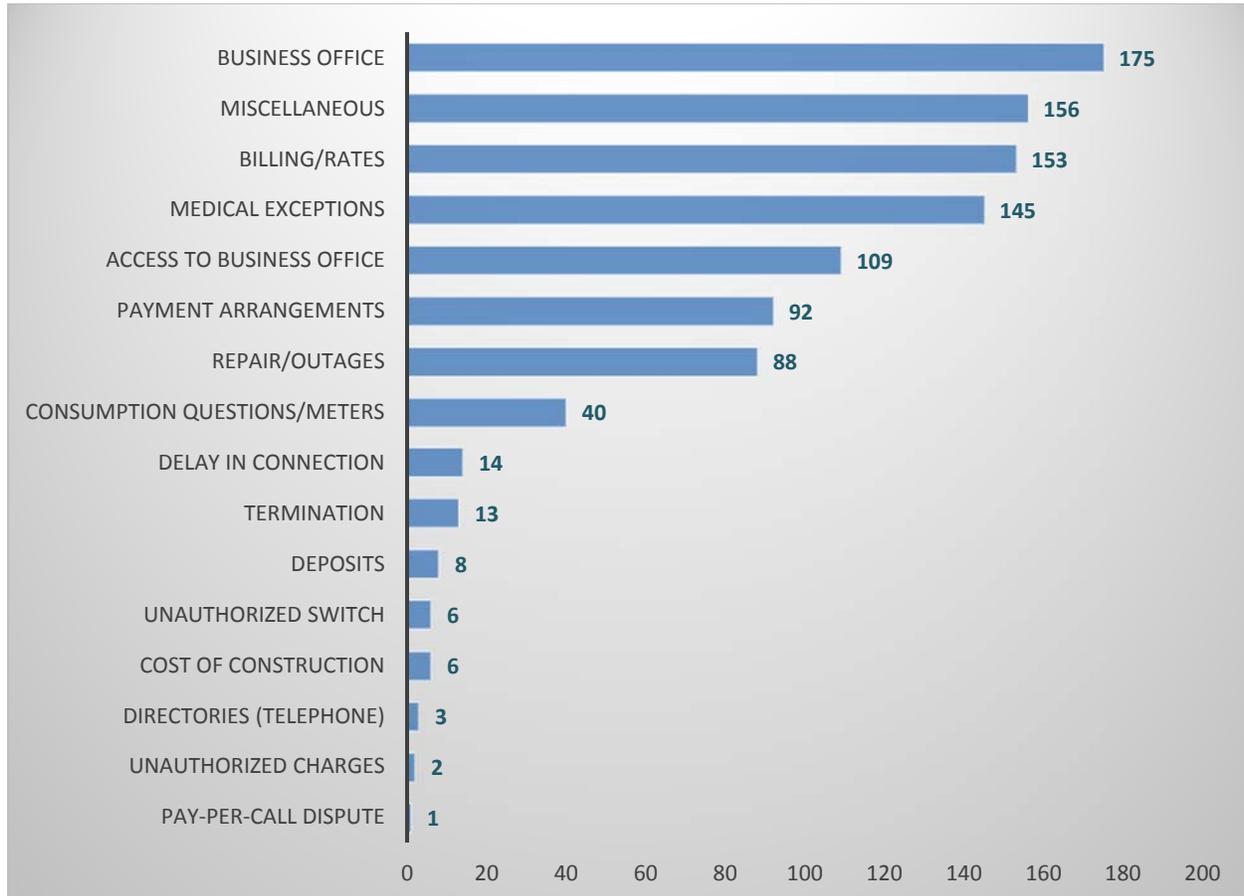
The following reports provide further analysis of calls and complaints received by the Consumer Assistance Program staff in 2013.

---Tina Shorten, Manager  
Consumer Assistance Program

## January – December 2013 Complaints By Utility Total – 1,011



## January – December 2013 Complaints by Category Total 1,011



Explanation of top five categories:

**Business Office:** Company personnel, misinformation, anything that doesn't fit elsewhere

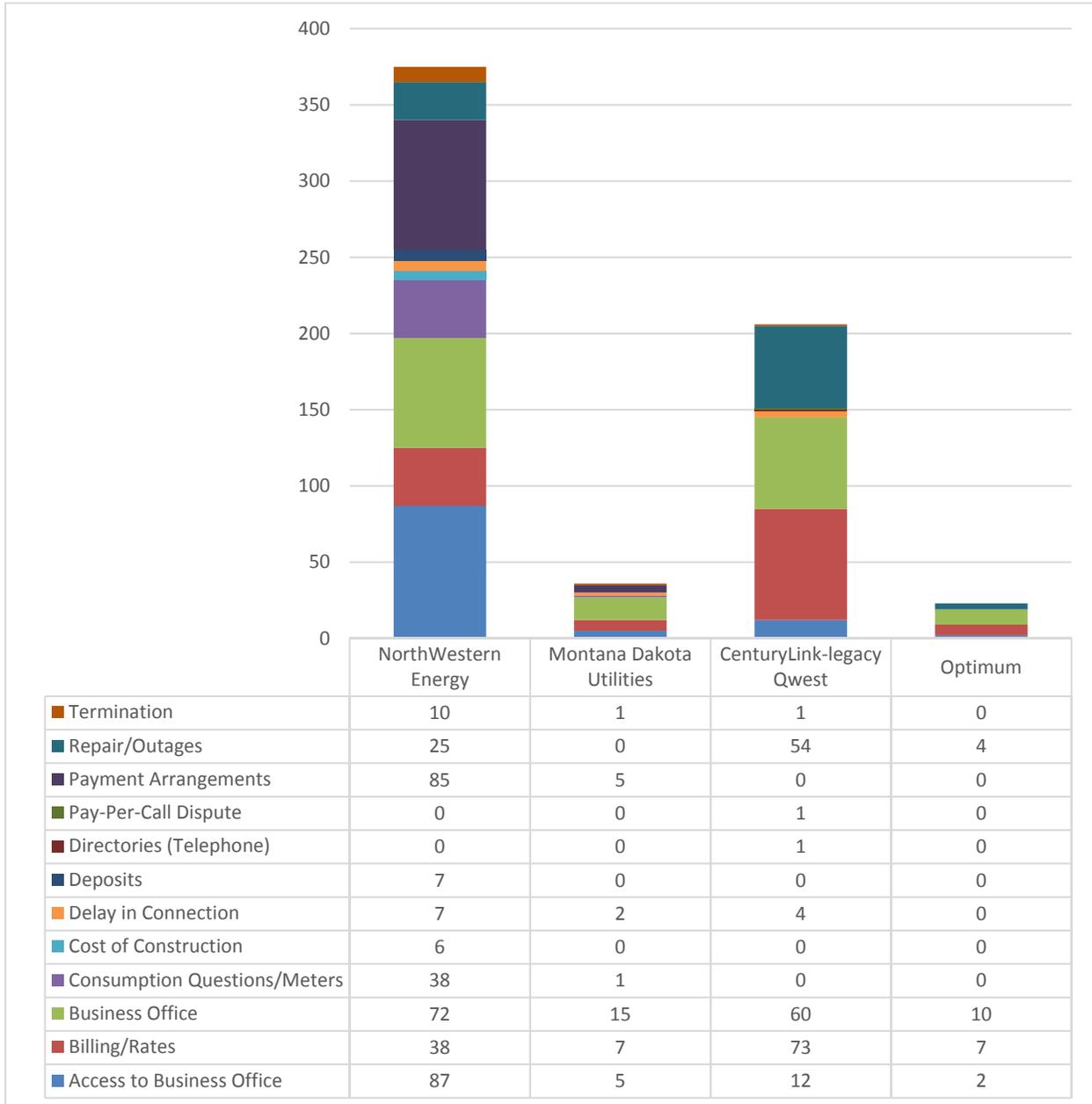
**Miscellaneous:** Requests for information that require research and response but do not require utility contact; and referrals on non-regulated products or to a non-regulated company

**Billing/Rates:** Incorrect billing, billing questions, collect call charges, calling plans, inmate calls

**Medical Exceptions:** Requests from a utility company to proceed with disconnect on an account noted with a medical exception

**Access to Business Office:** Customers not able to get through to the utility company to speak to a representative

## Breakdown by Category for Companies with Highest Complaint Volume



### **Complaint percentage when compared to total customers and/or access lines:**

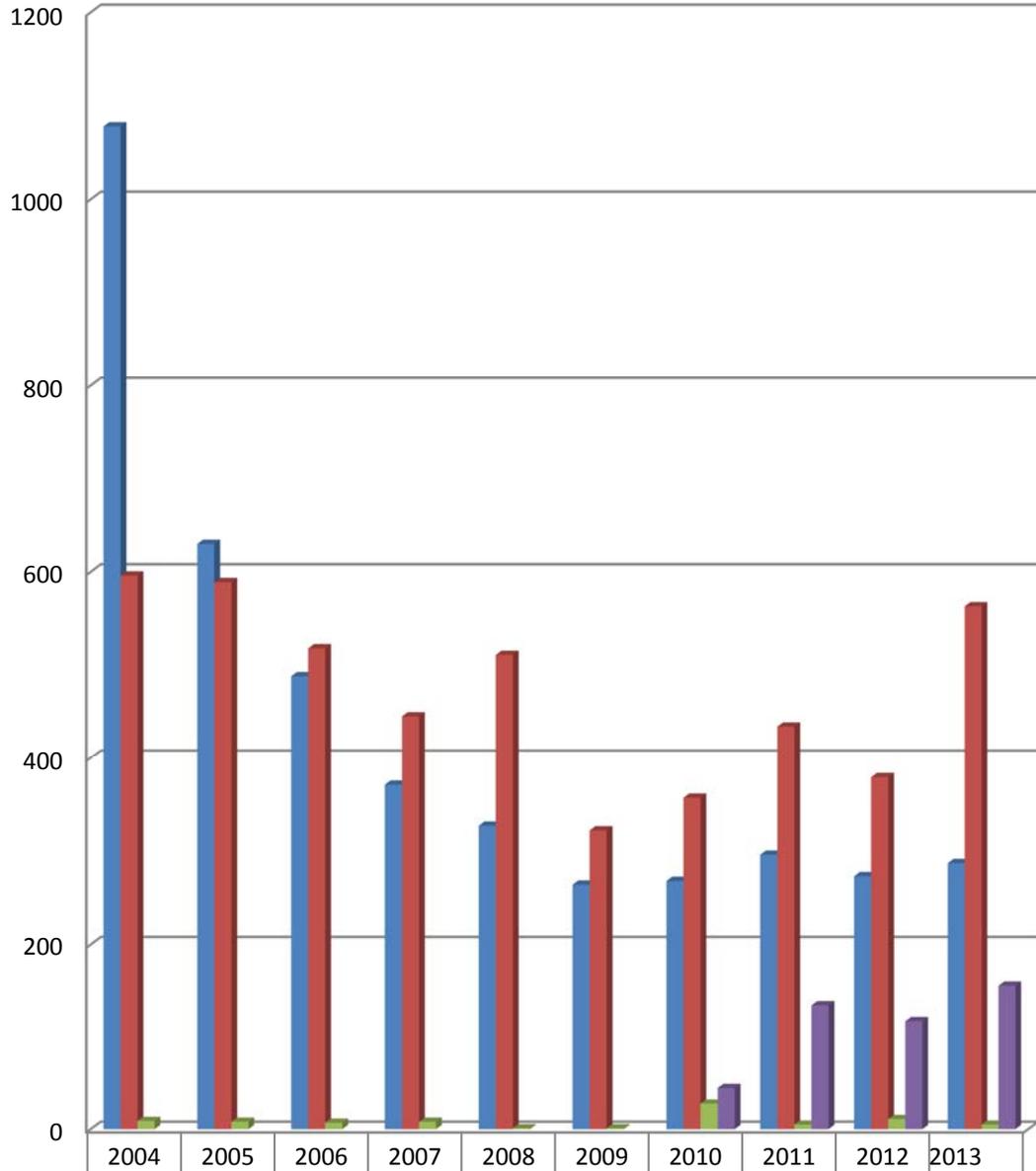
*\*NorthWestern Energy - .099%*

*\*CenturyLink-Legacy Qwest - .139%*

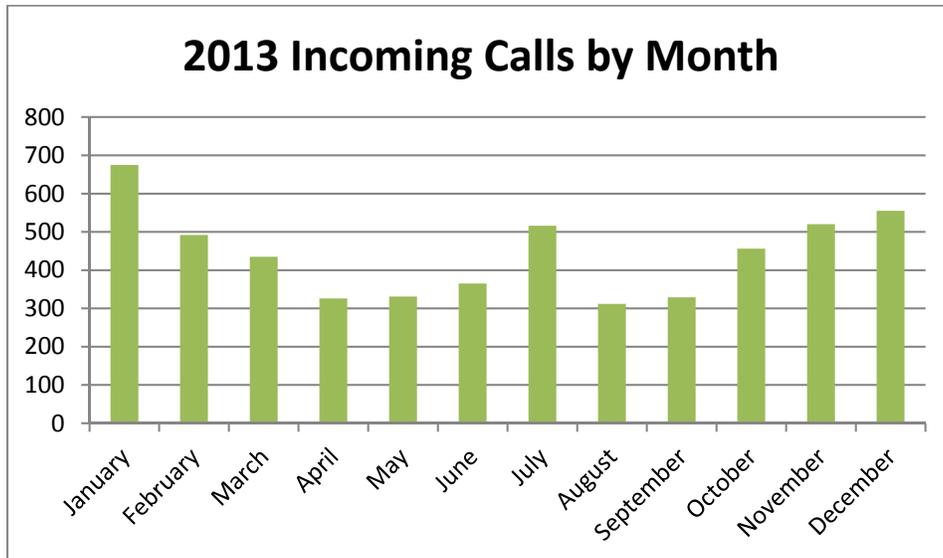
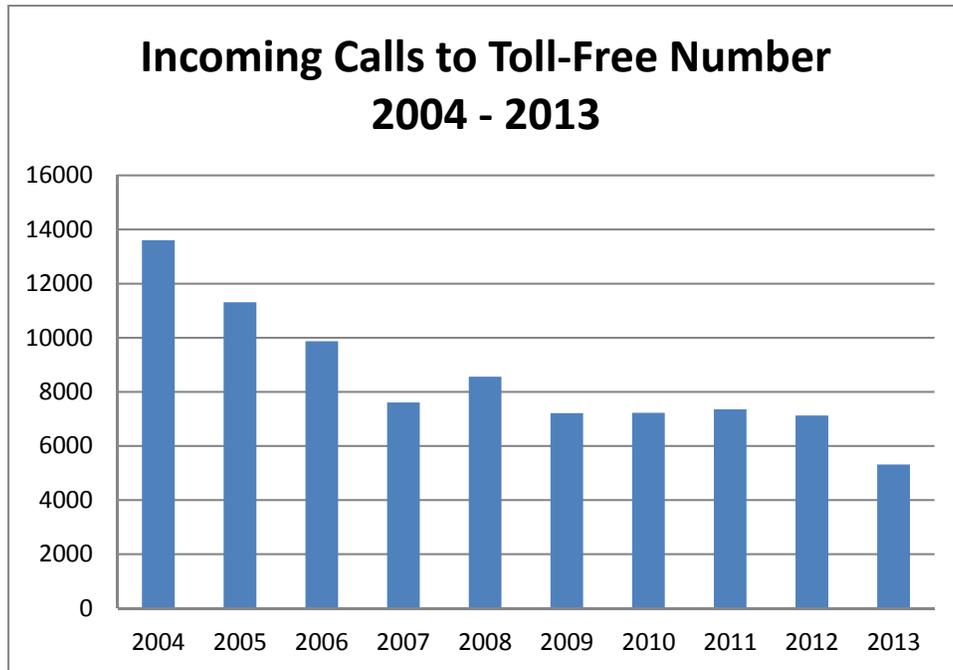
*\*Montana Dakota Utilities - .039%*

*\*Optimum - .028%*

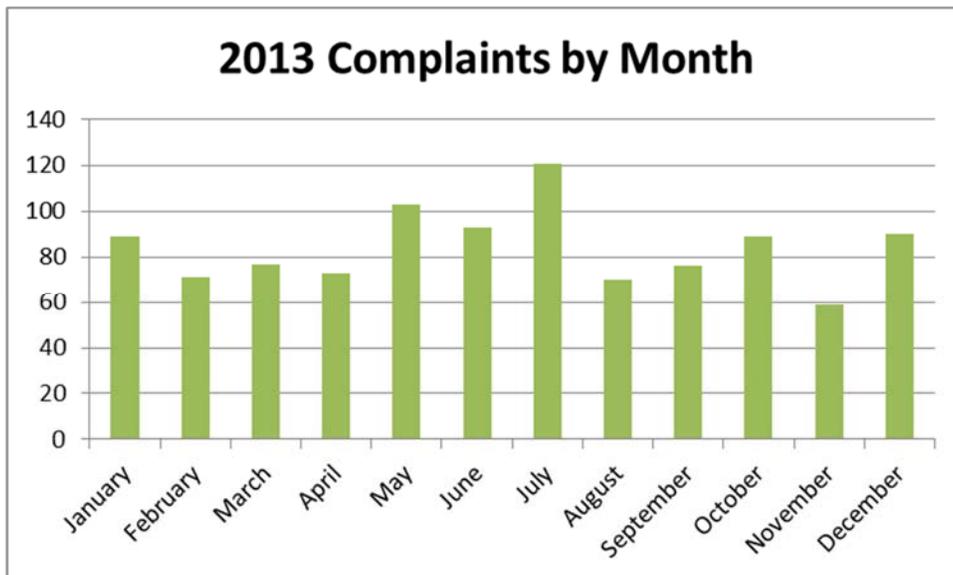
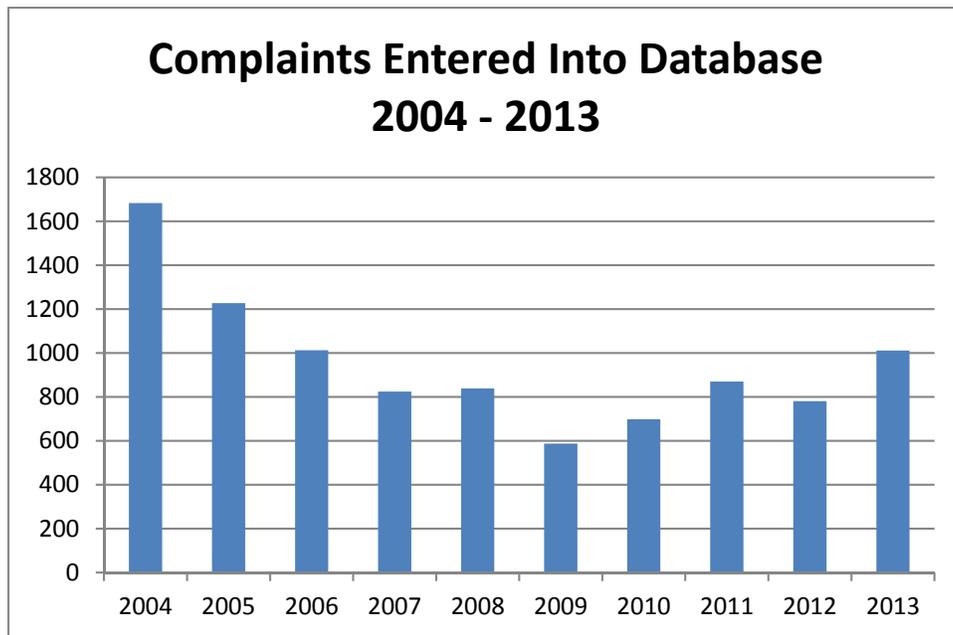
## Complaints by General Service Type 2004 - 2013

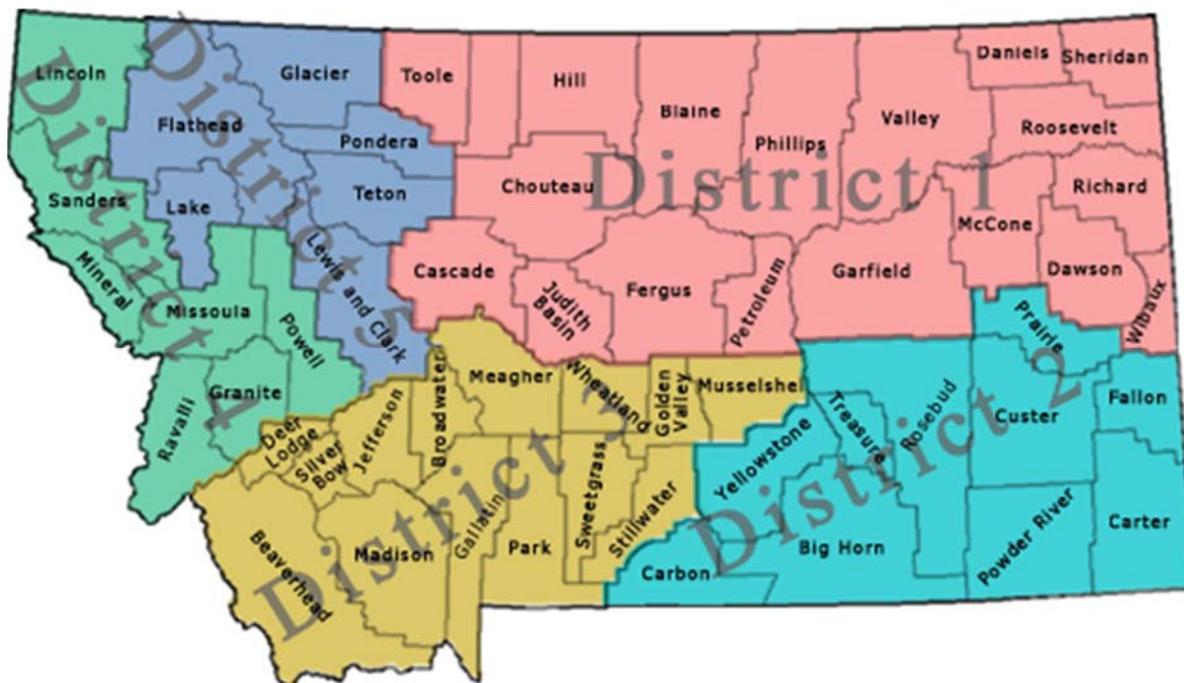


■ Telephone	1078	630	488	371	327	264	268	296	273	287
■ Energy	596	589	518	445	511	322	357	434	379	563
■ Water	9	8	7	8	1	1	28	5	11	5
■ Miscellaneous							45	135	118	156



\*\* -Actual call data for the period February 25 through March 24 was unavailable due to a software error so an average figure was used for that period.





Commissioner District 1 - Travis Kavulla  
 Commissioner District 2 - Kirk Bushman  
 Commissioner District 3 - Roger Koopman  
 Commissioner District 4 - Bob Lake  
 Commissioner District 5 - Bill Gallagher

Montana Public Service Commission  
 1701 Prospect Avenue  
 PO Box 202601  
 Helena MT 59620

(406) 444-6199 main phone number  
 (800) 646-6150 toll-free phone number  
 (406) 444-7618 fax number

PSC website: [www.psc.mt.gov](http://www.psc.mt.gov)  
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