

Service Date: February 22, 2001

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SERVICE REGULATION  
BEFORE THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION  
OF THE STATE OF MONTANA

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IN THE MATTER OF MONTANA POWER	)	UTILITY DIVISION
COMPANY, Complaint by RICHARD	)	
HELFRICH, Concerning Energy Audits	)	DOCKET NO. D2000.11.193
	)	ORDER NO. 6324

ORDER DISMISSING COMPLAINT WITH CONDITIONS

On November 27, 2000, Richard Helfrich filed before the Public Service Commission (PSC) a complaint against Montana Power Company (MPC). The complaint pertains to MPC energy audits of the Helfrich residence in Helena, Montana. On December 15, 2000, the PSC issued a notice of complaint to MPC. On January 5, 2001, MPC filed a response to the complaint.

Helfrich asserts that an MPC energy audit at what is now his residence, but done at the request of a former owner, failed to accurately identify the R value of the insulation in the attic. Helfrich also asserts that a second MPC energy audit of his residence, one done at his request, also may fail to accurately identify the R value of that insulation. Helfrich comments that the person conducting the second audit appeared less than professional and did not have the proper equipment to conduct the audit (e.g., a ladder).

Helfrich asserts that his budget billing amounts (i.e., averaged energy bills) are greater than he had anticipated because of the incorrect R value information reported in the audits. Helfrich appears to suspect that his experience with the audits is not unique to him and might indicate that the MPC audit program is flawed.

MPC responds that it contracts with a company known as Xenergy to perform energy audits and that over 40,000 energy audits have been performed by Xenergy since the audit program began in 1992. MPC claims that the audits are done professionally by trained personnel, monitoring and quality assurance procedures are employed, and the audit program

rates high in customer satisfaction. MPC has provided copies of several recent months of audit-customer comment cards. These appear to express customer satisfaction with the program.

MPC states that second audits at a residence are rare, as they are not cost justified, but in Helfrich's case an auditor did visit the Helfrich residence a second time to discuss Helfrich's concerns about the initial audit. MPC comments that the auditor did not have access to a vehicle which carries the standard equipment used for audits. MPC asserts that the attic insulation in the Helfrich residence is atypical, not faced, and has no R value markings. MPC suggests that this may have contributed to any error in the initial estimation of the attic insulation R value.

MPC also believes that Helfrich's concern may have originated because of a budget billing problem or error which resulted in MPC imposing a higher budget billing amount (about \$130 per month) to recover for an MPC new-billing-system failure to make a necessary adjustment in the budget billing amount (about \$59 per month) in the previous year. MPC comments that recovery of the underbilled amount is about complete and the accurate budget billing amount (about \$95 per month) will be in place soon.

The PSC determines that the Helfrich situation is most probably an isolated, single instance of apparent error in the MPC audit program. Through the years the MPC audit program has been in place the PSC has received few, if any, complaints pertaining to the program. The facts surrounding the Helfrich complaint tend to indicate that the initial audit of the Helfrich residence did not accurately rate the R value of the attic insulation, but the remedy for this (e.g., damages), if any is available, would be outside of PSC jurisdiction.

The PSC therefore dismisses the Helfrich complaint. However, the PSC intends to monitor the MPC energy audit program for the next several months and directs MPC to provide to the PSC, at the end of each month for six months beginning with March 2001, copies of all audit-customer comment cards received by MPC and Xenergy and a list of all customers who have obtained an energy audit during that month, including the name, address, and phone number of the customer, the date the audit was performed, and the name of the person conducting the audit. The copies and list must be directed to Tina Shorten at the PSC offices and must be identified by the PSC docket number of this proceeding (D2000.11.193).

Done and dated this 29th day of January, 2001, by a vote of 5-0.

BY ORDER OF THE MONTANA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

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GARY FELAND, Chairman

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JAY STOVALL, Vice Chairman

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BOB ANDERSON, Commissioner

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MATT BRAINARD, Commissioner

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BOB ROWE, Commissioner

ATTEST:

Rhonda J. Simmons  
Commission Secretary

(SEAL)

NOTE: Any interested party may request the Commission to reconsider this decision. A motion to reconsider must be filed within ten (10) days. See 38.2.4806, ARM.