

# MONTANA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION



*Consumer Assistance Program*

*2015 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 2015, the toll-free consumer assistance line received 4,431 incoming calls. Consumers were also able to contact our office through the following means and frequencies:

- 185 electronically-submitted requests for assistance;
- 59 requests for assistance received through the US Postal Service;
- 11 in-person consultations; and,
- An indeterminate number of calls received by either the PSC's non-toll-free consumer assistance number or the PSC's main phone number. (The PSC has no way to monitor how many of these calls are received.)

Of the 4,686 documented contacts made to this office through the end of December, 1,156 resulted in entries into our consumer assistance tracking database. 502 concerned energy; 405 concerned telecommunications; six concerned water/sewer; and 243 were miscellaneous contacts.

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 requests for assistance received by the Consumer Assistance Program staff in 2015.

---Tina Shorten, Manager  
Consumer Assistance Program



2015  
Highlights

CenturyLink accepted CAFII funds to settle service quality docket – \$91 million in funds over the next 6 years will bring broadband to 33,000 Montana locations

Commissioners and staff toured various facilities of NorthWestern Energy, Montana Dakota Utilities, and CenturyLink

NWE continued to open up local walk-in customer service centers, with centers now available in Billings, Bozeman, Helena, Great Falls, Missoula, and Butte

Proposed rate changes due to rate cases, tracker dockets, and pass-through of property taxes resulted in numerous calls from concerned consumers.

A roundtable was held to bring together property owners and utility companies to discuss continuous service concerns, resulting in some improved processes

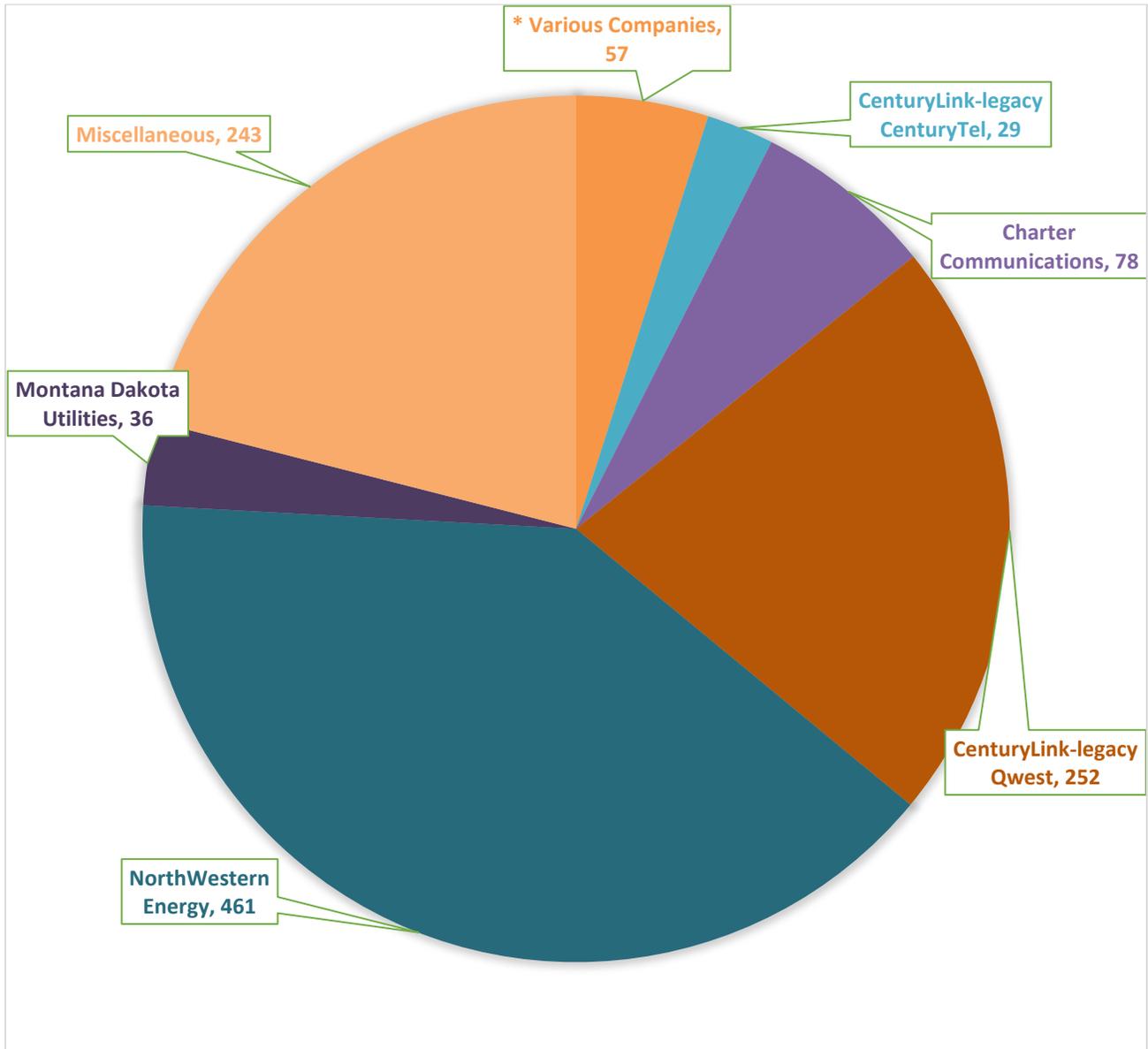
Both NWE and MDU have implemented online maps to allow real-time viewing of electric service outages

Metering issues became more prevalent:

- net meters
- demand meters
- master meters

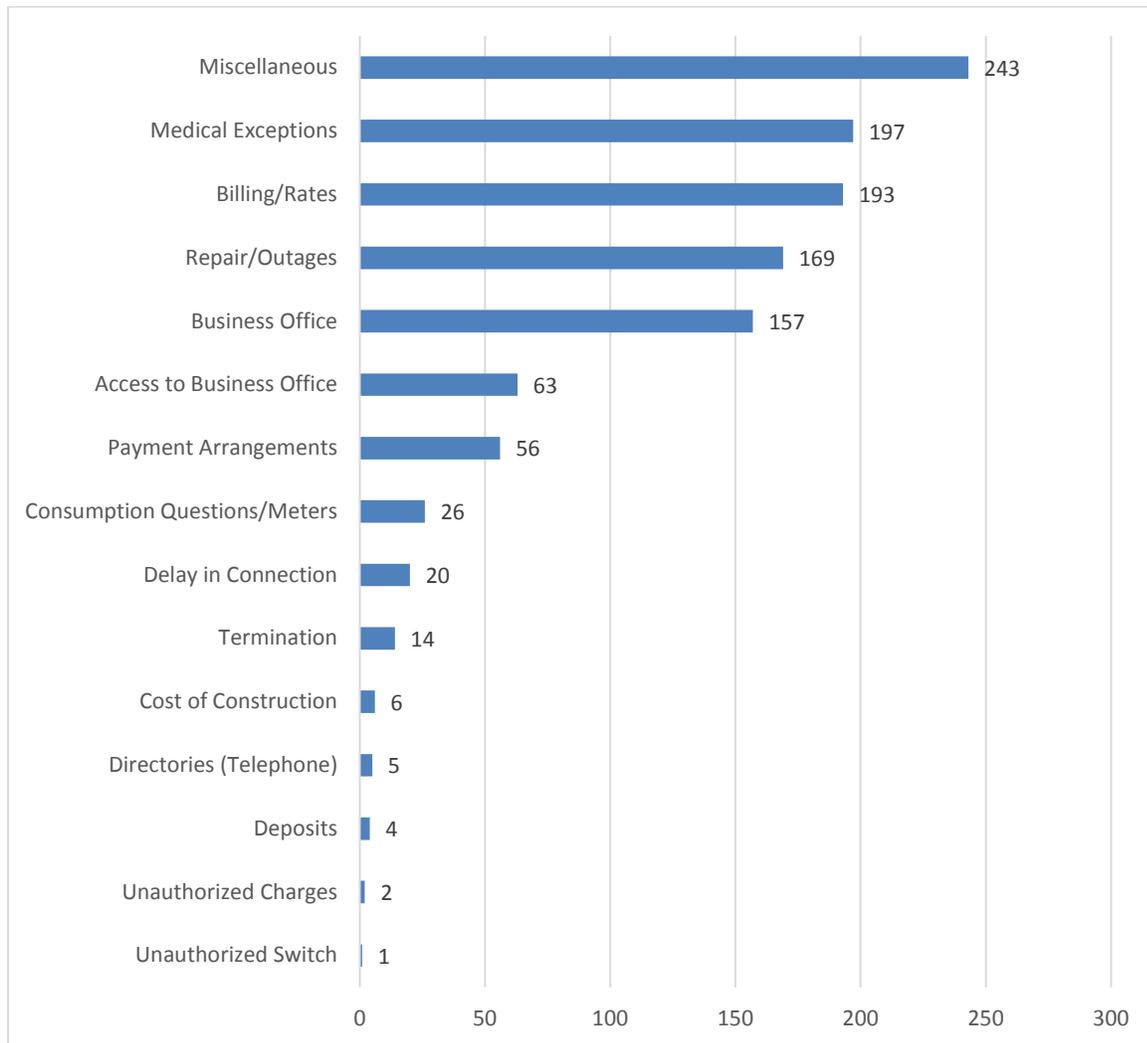
The FCC has projected that Montana will retain 406 as the single area code until 2022, due to actions taken by the PSC, in cooperation with Montana's telecom providers

**January – December 2015**  
**Consumer Assistance By Utility**  
**Total – 1156**



\* Requests for consumer assistance against these companies totaled 10 or less each: American Phone Services, AquaFlo, AT&T, Blackfoot Communications, USA Communications, Central Montana Communications, CenturyLink Long Distance, Consumer Telecom, Energy West, Citizens Telecommunications, Global Tel\*Link, Hot Springs Telephone, IDT America Corp, Integra Telecom, Long Distance Access, MCI, Project Telephone, Sleepy Hollow Oil and Gas, Telmate, TTI National, USA Digital Communications, VarTec Telecom, Verizon Long Distance, Wettington Acres Water, Wilder Resorts, Williams Water Works, Wimactel, Working Assets.

**January – December 2015**  
**Consumer Assistance by Category**  
**Total 1156**



Explanation of top five categories:

**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

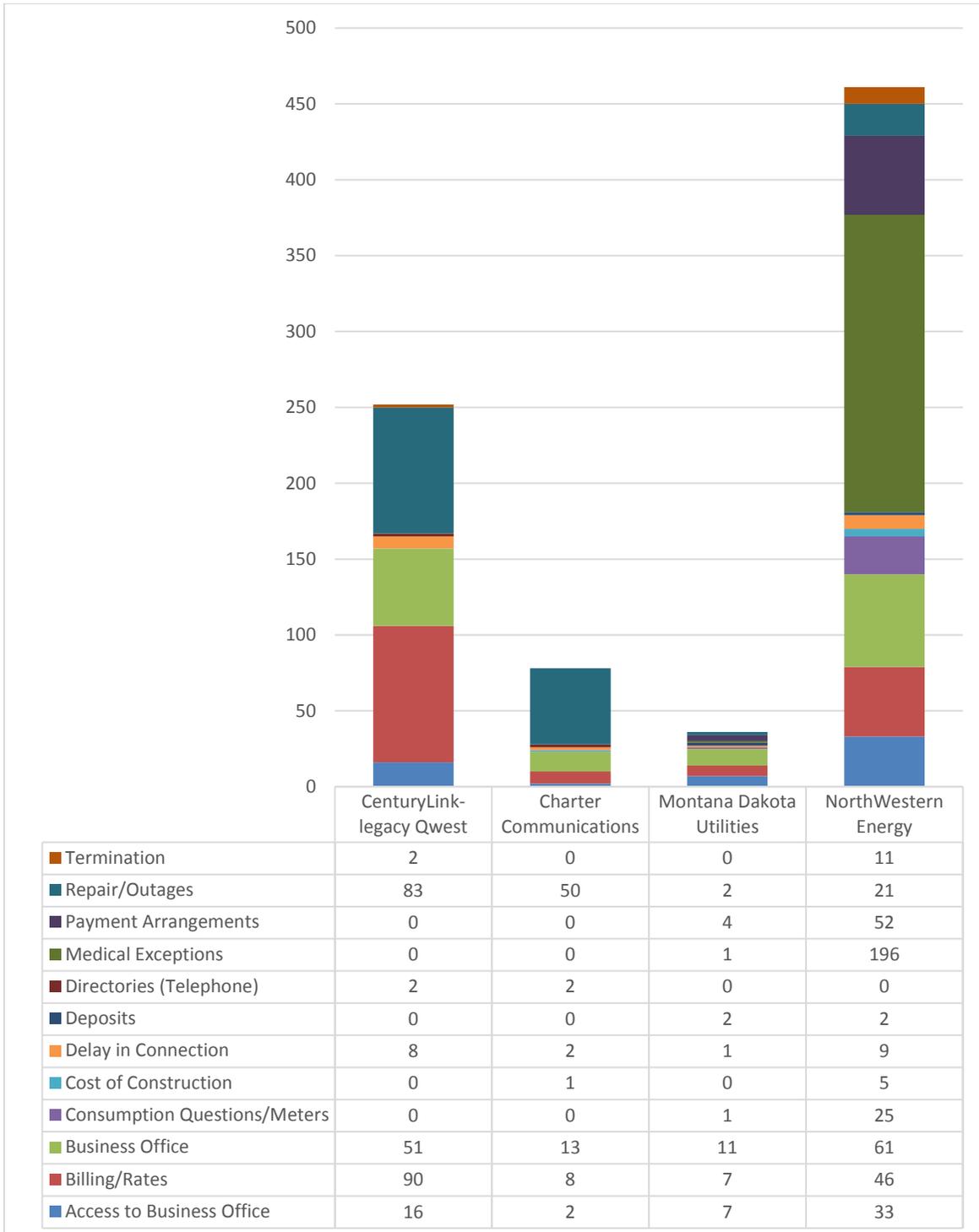
**Medical Exceptions:** Requests from a utility company to proceed with disconnect on a medically-protected account

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

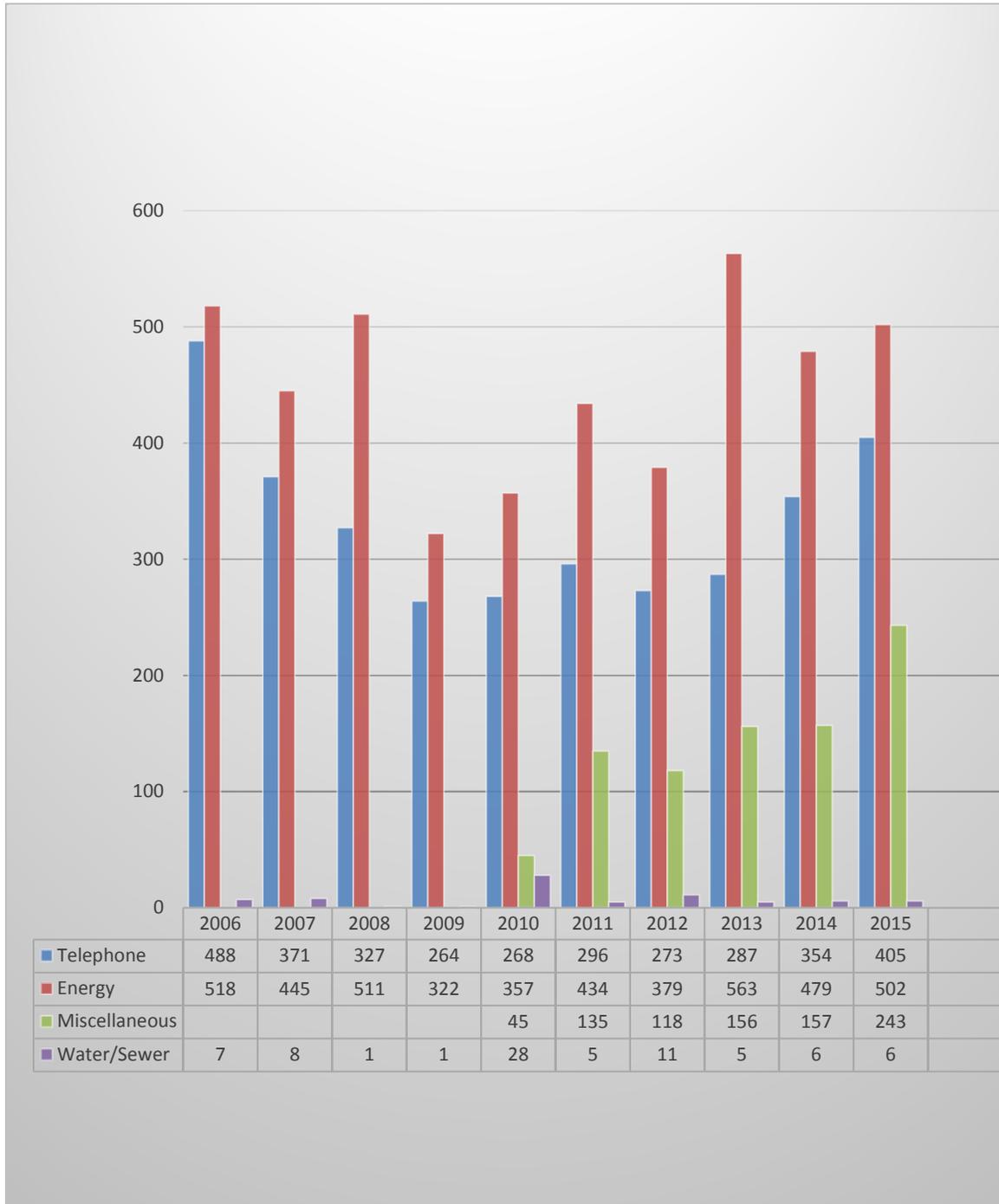
**Repair/Outages:** Outages or repair issues

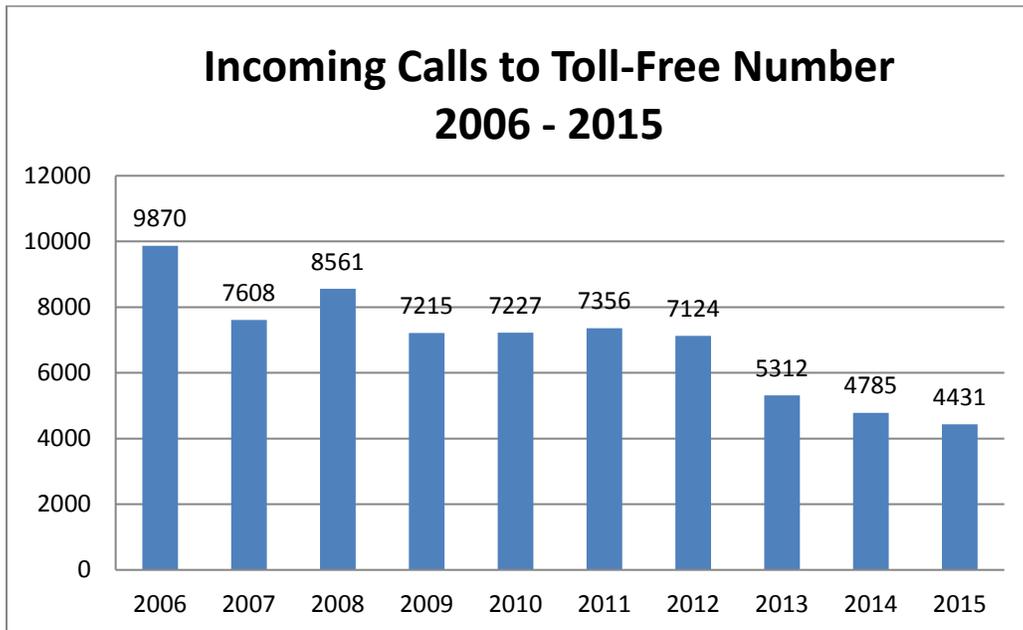
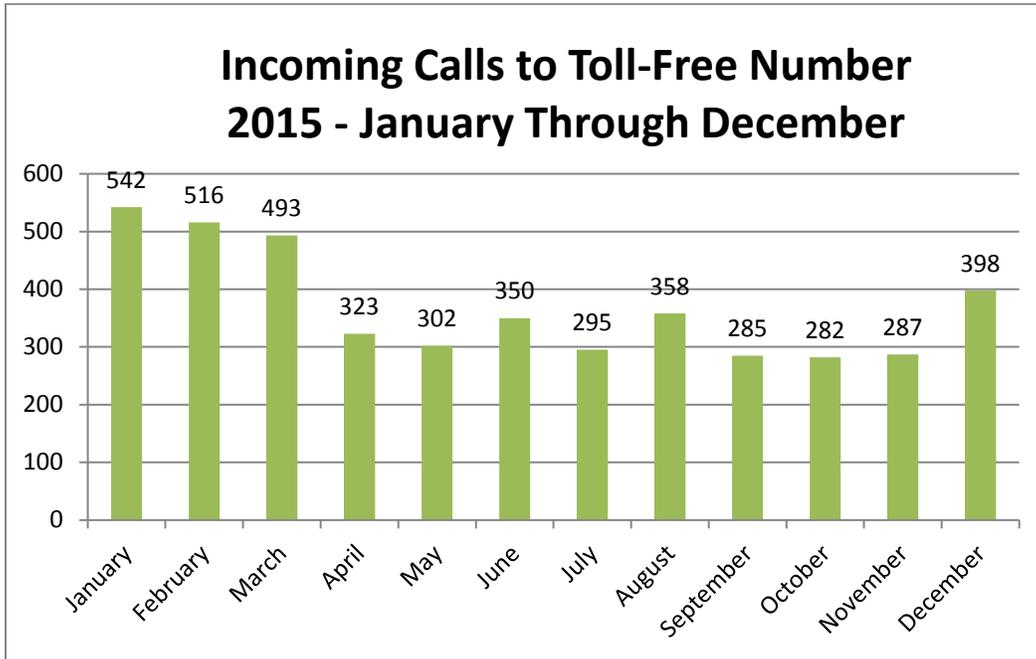
**Business Office:** Company personnel, misinformation, anything that doesn't fit elsewhere

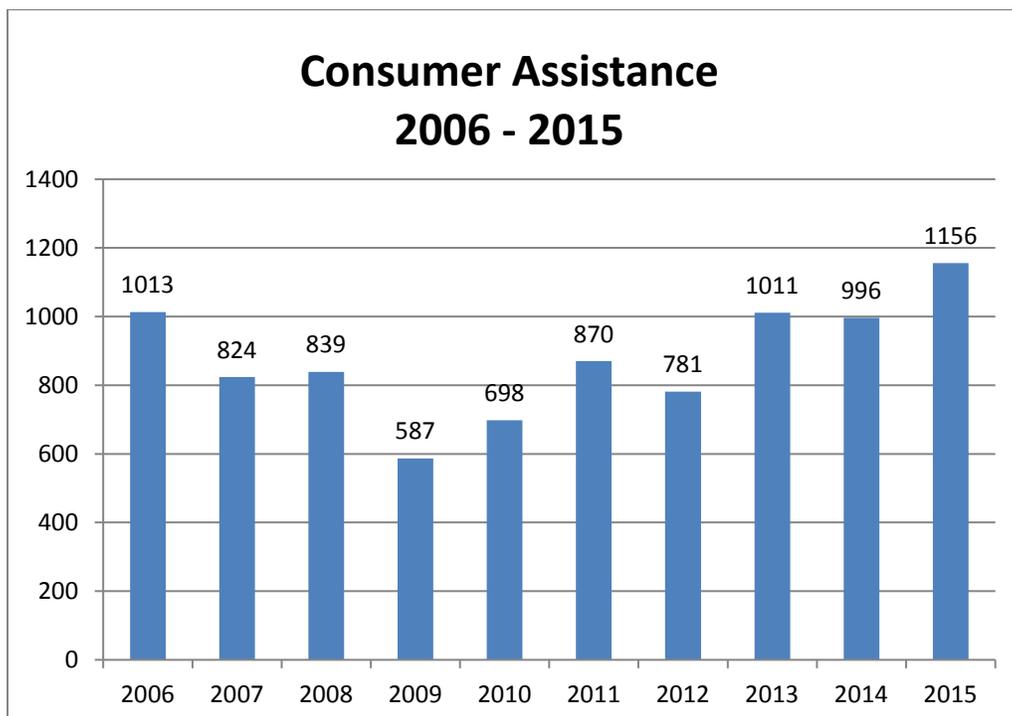
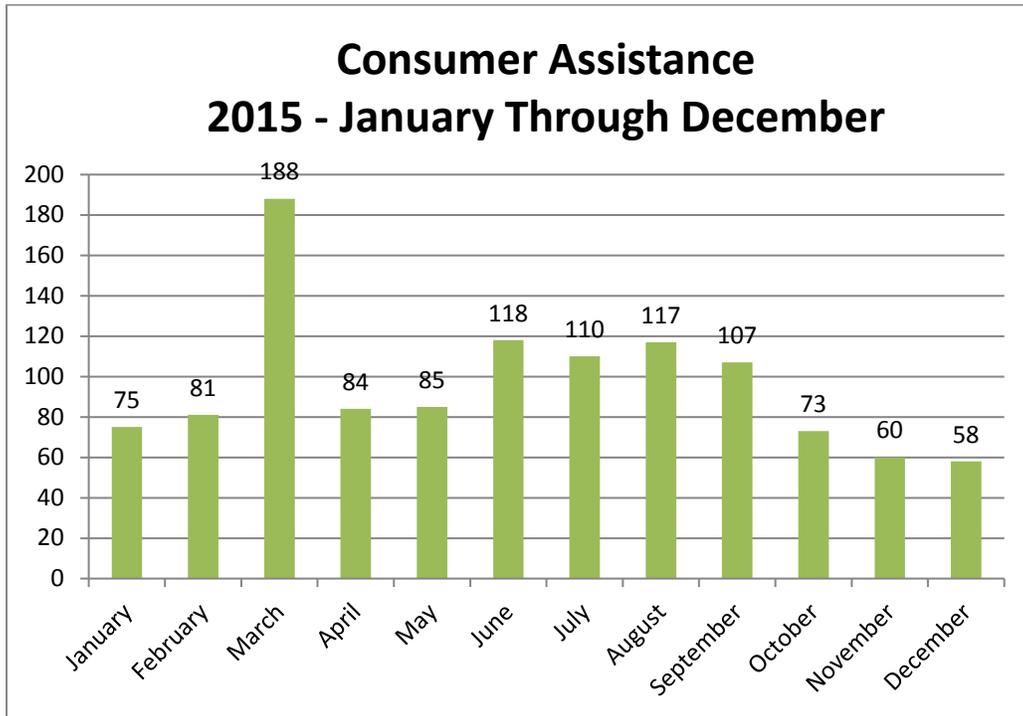
## Breakdown by Category for Companies with Highest Volume of Consumer Assistance Requests

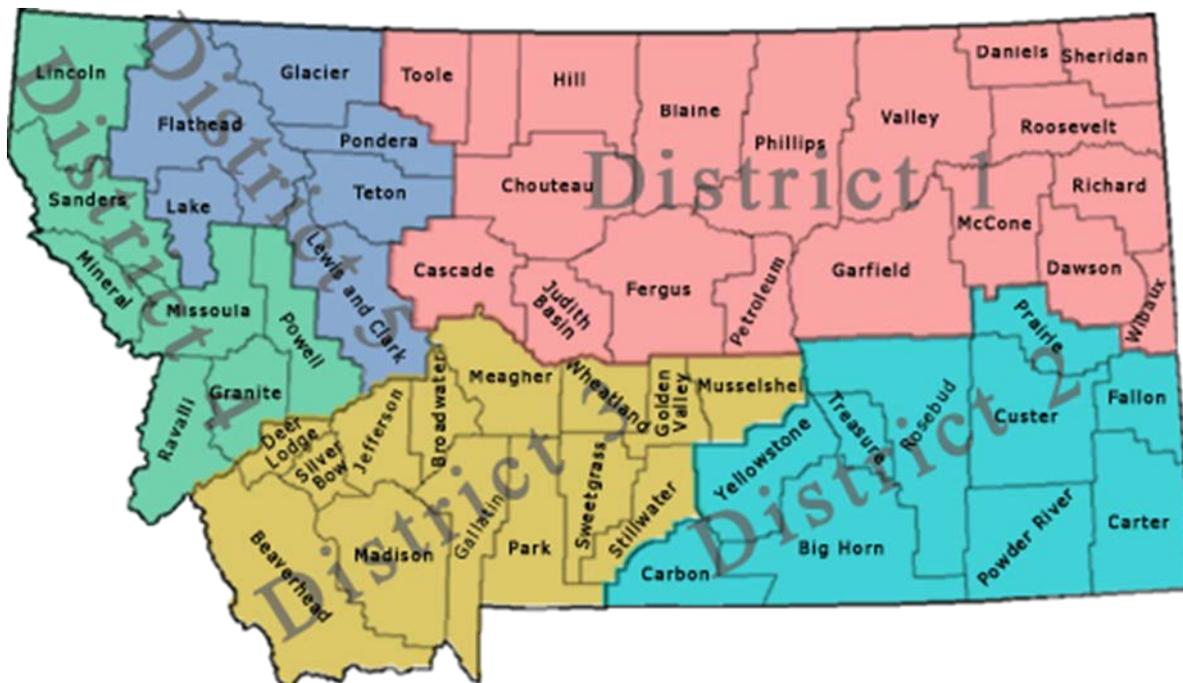


## Complaints by General Service Type 2006 – 2015









Commissioner District 1 - Travis Kavulla  
Commissioner District 2 - Kirk Bushman  
Commissioner District 3 - Roger Koopman  
Commissioner District 4 - Bob Lake  
Commissioner District 5 – Brad Johnson

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