

MONTANA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION



Consumer Assistance Program

2014 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 2014, the toll-free consumer assistance line received 4785 incoming calls. Consumers were also able to contact our office through the following means and frequencies:

- 57 online complaints through the PSC website;
- 42 direct e-mail complaints to a staff person;
- 66 US Postal Service complaints;
- 15 walk-in complaints; 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 4965 documented contacts made to this office through the end of December, 996 resulted in complaints being entered into the tracking database. 479 concerned energy; 354 concerned telecommunications; 157 were miscellaneous; and six 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 2014.

---Tina Shorten, Manager
Consumer Assistance Program



2014
Highlights

CenturyLink Service Quality docket opened to investigate outage and repair issues, after calls to the Consumer Assistance line revealed violations of ARM 38.5.3371(7)(b)

CenturyLink allowed to change most rates without PSC approval, after the Commission granted their de-tariffing request

CellularOne relinquished its ETC status and discontinued providing wireless service in Montana

Access complaints against NorthWestern became frequent after their transition to a new computer system resulted in longer than normal hold times

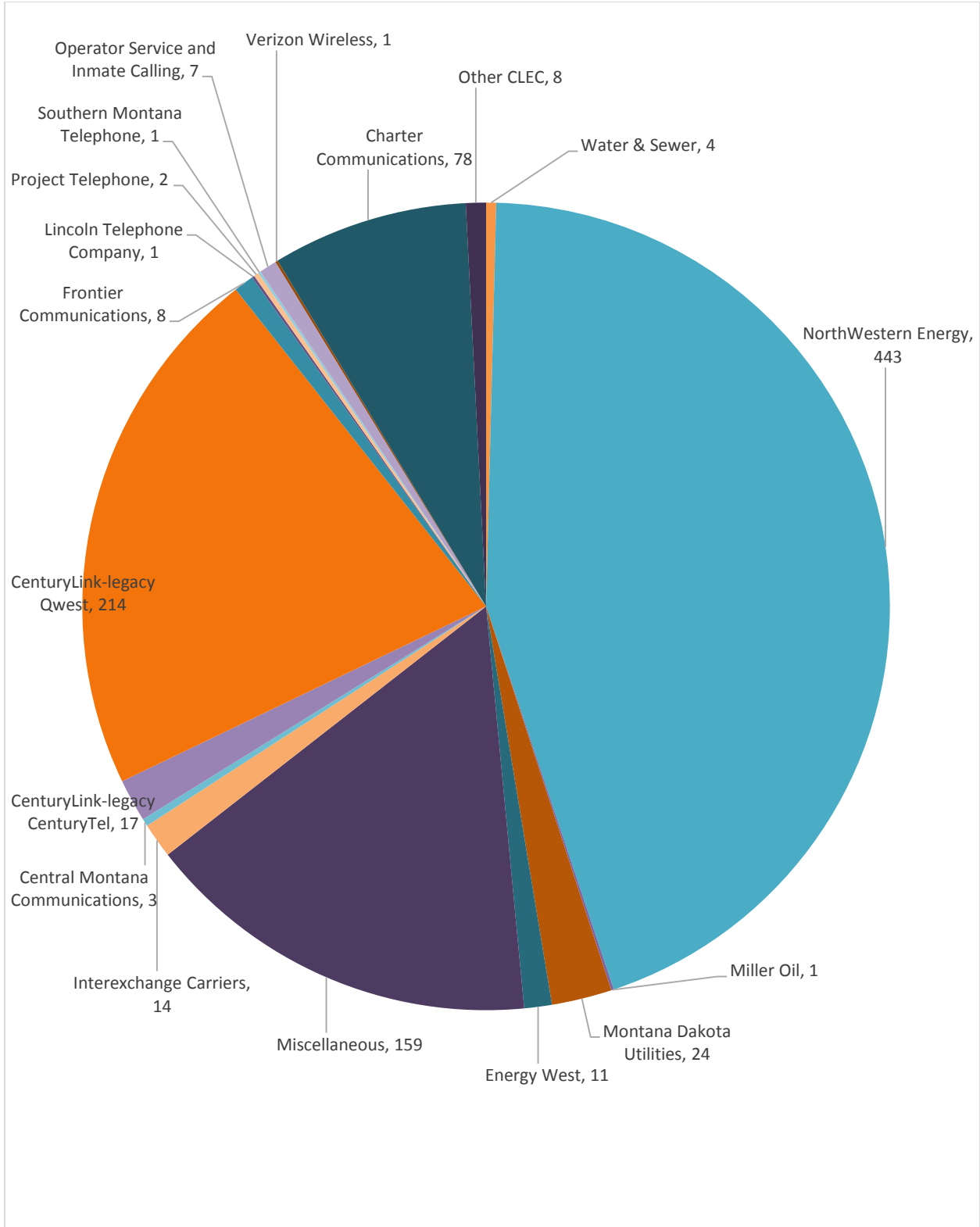
Havre Pipeline farm tap customers reported increasing reduction in gas pressure, prompting the initiation of a docket to determine next steps

NorthWestern Energy opened up a local customer service walk-in office in Missoula, with more towns to follow

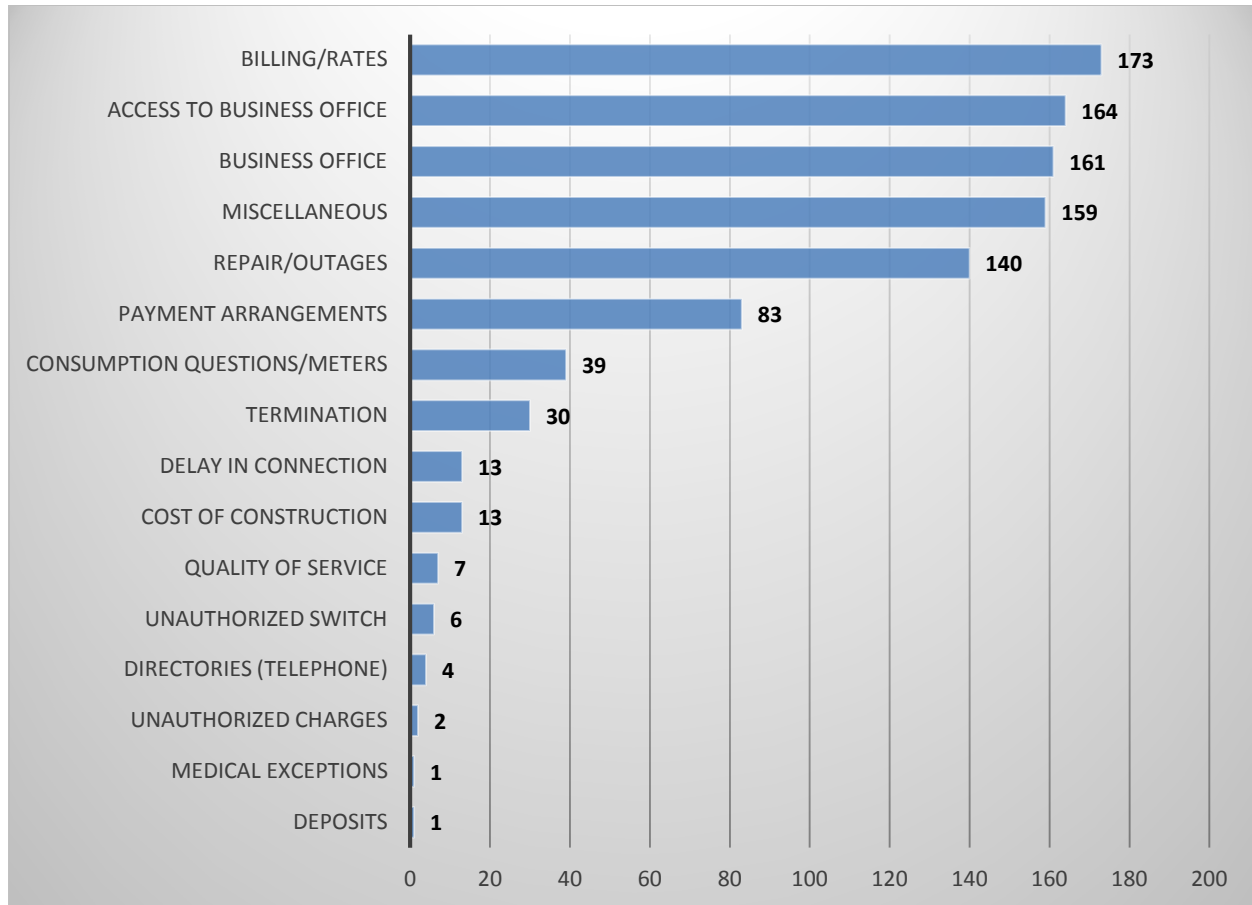
Commissioners and staff toured various facilities of NorthWestern Energy and Montana Dakota Utilities

Montana consumers expressed great interest in NorthWestern Energy's purchase of hydro facilities from PPL

January – December 2014 Complaints By Utility Total – 996



January – December 2014
Complaints by Category
Total 996



Explanation of top five categories:

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

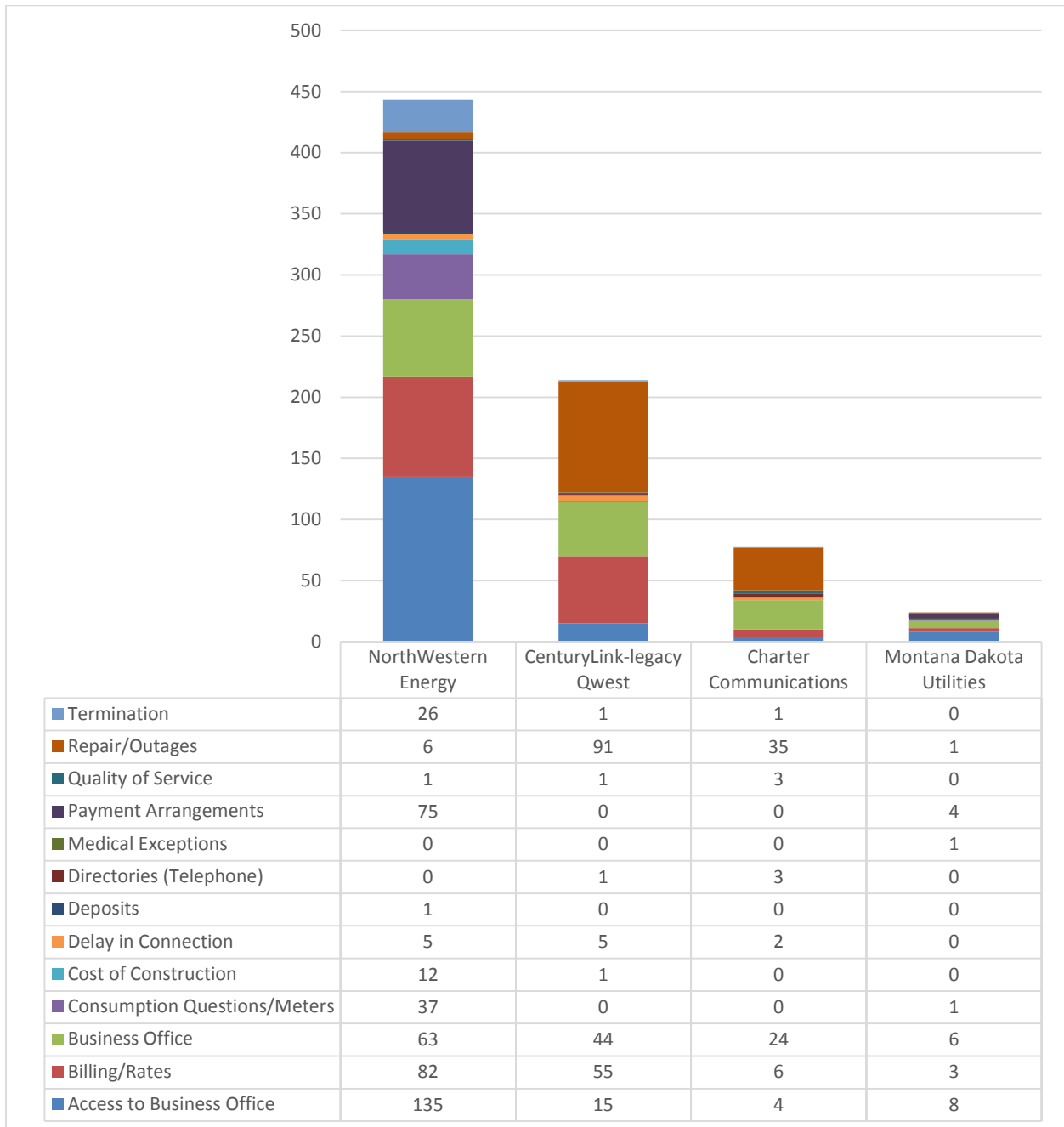
Access to Business Office: Customers not able to get through to the utility company to speak to a representative

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

Repair/Outages: Outages or repair issues

Breakdown by Category for Companies with Highest Complaint Volume



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

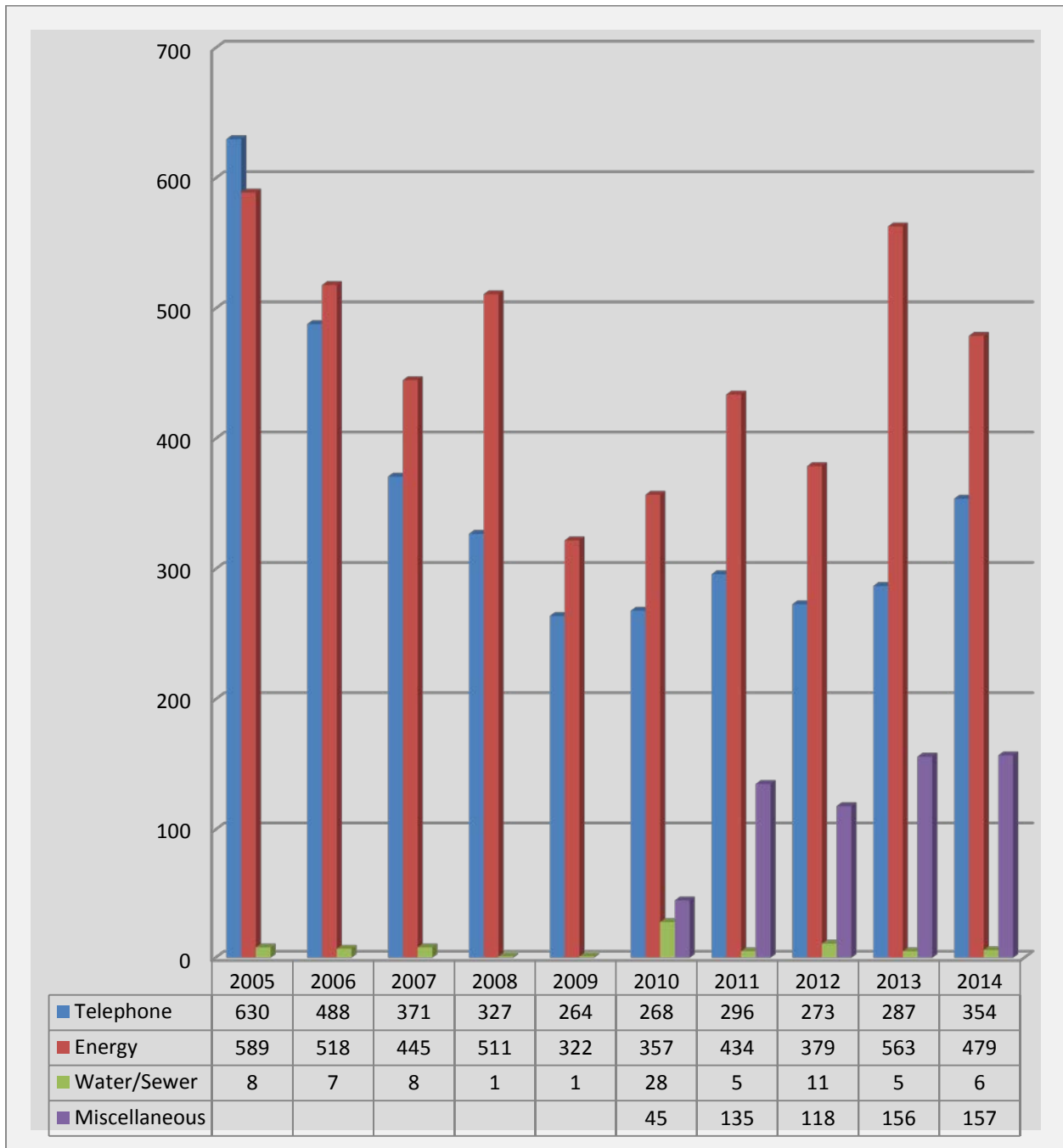
**NorthWestern Energy - .114%*

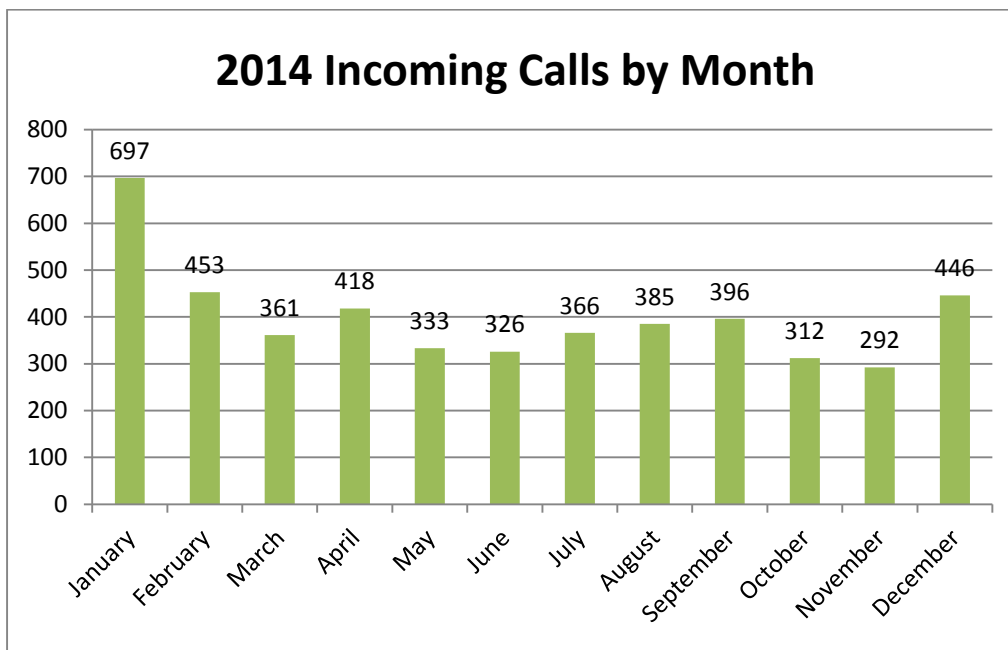
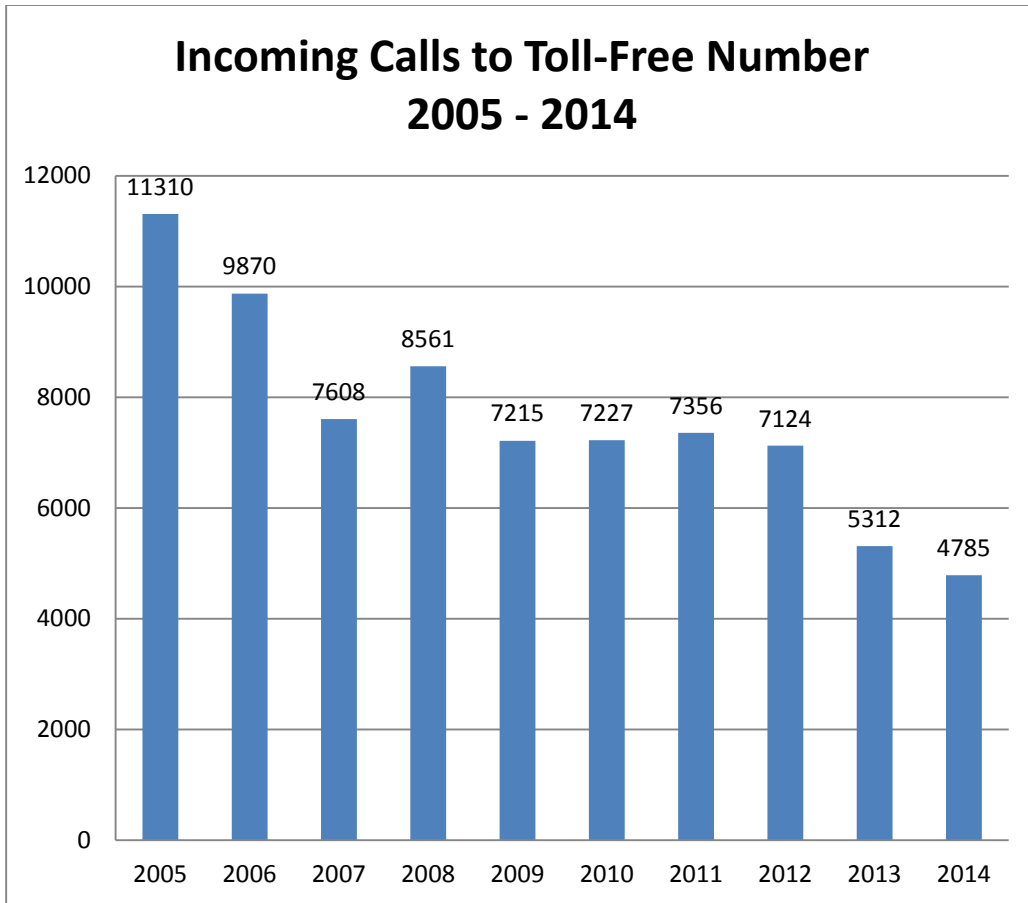
**CenturyLink-Legacy Qwest - .159%*

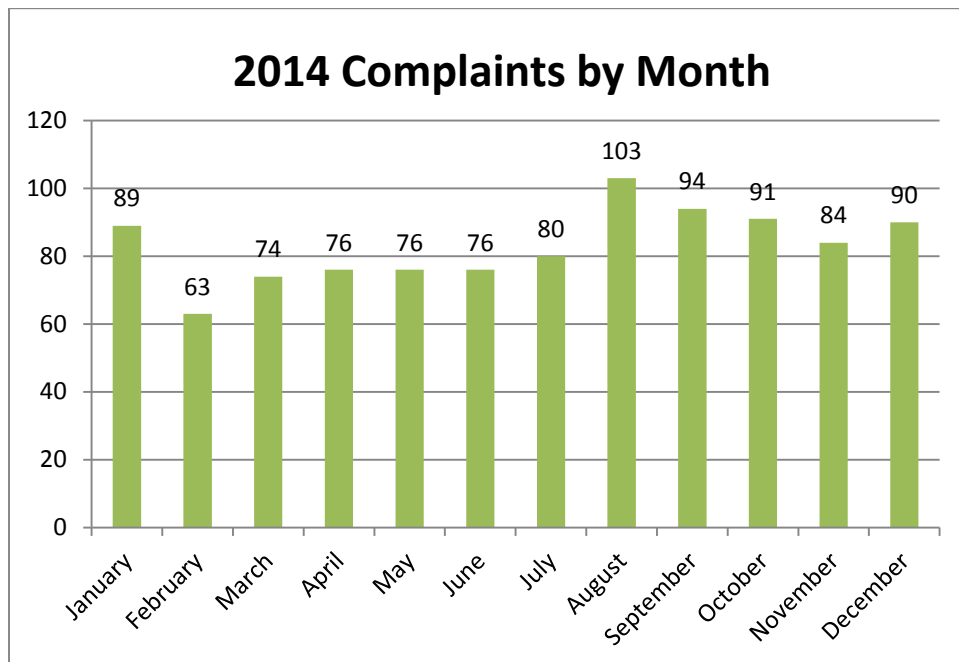
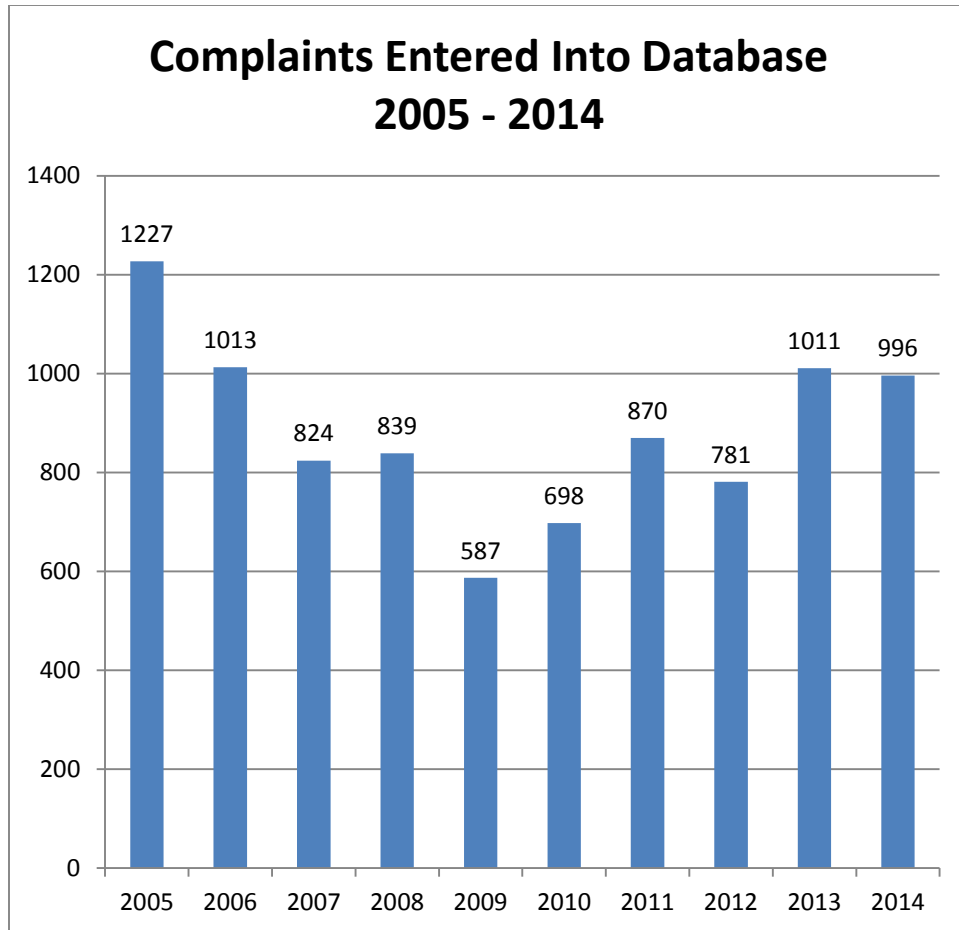
**Montana Dakota Utilities - .026%*

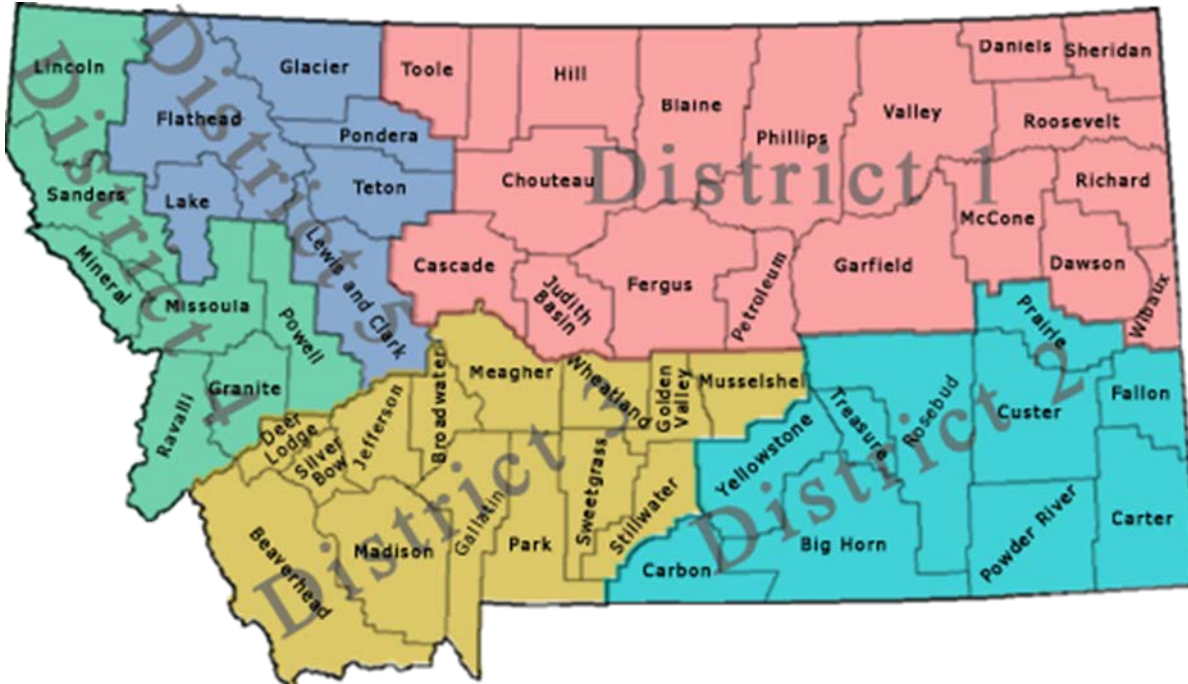
**Charter Communications - .029%*

Complaints by General Service Type 2005 – 2014









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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