



Ontario Energy Board

Commission de l'énergie de l'Ontario

Consumer Snapshot



***July to September
2010***

Introduction

Welcome to the July to September 2010 issue of the Ontario Energy Board's Consumer Snapshot.

Published quarterly, the Snapshot is a simple overview of the energy market and how the OEB is acting in the interests of you, the consumer, to ensure a fair and efficient marketplace.

Inside you will find details on the questions, concerns and complaints raised by consumers to the OEB's consumer relations area. You will also find information and statistics intended to help you better understand the types of issues raised to the OEB by consumers ("**Consumer Contacts**", page 3) and how complaints are handled ("**Consumer Complaints**", page 6).

Our "**Escalated Consumer Complaints**" and "**Compliance Management**" sections (beginning on page 8) identify what the Board has been doing to resolve consumer disputes and ensure that utilities, retailers and marketers are complying with the conditions of their licences. When necessary, the Board can also take enforcement action on a company. Details of any enforcement measures taken this quarter are also included in the "**Compliance Management**" section.

Informing the public about their rights and responsibilities in the energy sector is an important part of the OEB's mandate. We work with partners, community groups and the media to achieve this goal. Check out which communities we've visited recently under the "**Consumer Outreach**" section (page 10) and how you can bring the OEB to your community.

July to September 2010—Quick Facts

- ▶ **10,563** consumer contacts
- ▶ **1,549** complaints registered
- ▶ **384** complaints escalated for further review
- ▶ Approximately **\$75,000** returned to consumers for billing adjustments, waived liquidated damages and reimbursements by licensees

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Consumer Contacts

Consumers contact the OEB by phone, letter, fax, e-mail or through our internet-based web form. Some consumers have a simple enquiry while others look to raise a concern or file a complaint about a company licensed by the OEB.

Enquiries are general requests for information or clarification about the energy sector.

Examples:

- What are the current time-of-use electricity periods / prices?
- Where can I find information about any applications my utility has before the OEB?
- What should I consider before signing an energy contract?

On occasion, consumers may wish to express their dissatisfaction with an aspect of the energy sector. In some cases the OEB does not have jurisdiction over the area of their concern. In other cases the consumer may not have enough information to register a complaint. For these consumers the OEB registers a **Concern** in our tracking system.

Examples:

- Disagree with smart meters or time-of-use pricing.
- Door-to-door agent gave incorrect information but consumer does not recall what company they worked for.
- Consumer signed a hot water tank rental contract or carbon offset program.

The OEB also logs **Complaints** from consumers who claim their utility, retailer or marketer did not follow its legal or regulatory obligations including the Board's rules, codes and guidelines.

Examples:

- Electricity utility charged more of a security deposit than is allowed under OEB rules.
- Electricity retailer or natural gas marketer did not reaffirm the contract as required under legislation.
- The consumer's electricity or natural gas contract was renewed without the consumer receiving a renewal package.

Consumers may raise several issues related to their primary reason for contacting the Board. The OEB notes each issue raised in the consumer's enquiry, concern or complaint. The charts on the following two pages show the top 10 issues raised by consumers for Retailers / Marketers and for Utility / Other during the last quarter.

Top 10 Issues Raised – Retailer / Marketer

Rank	(Rank Last Quarter)	Issue Raised	Examples
1	(1)	No Copy of Contract	No copy of existing contract, consumer does not recall signing contract, copy of contract not provided when requested
2	(3)	Renewal	Did not receive renewal package, renewed after cancellation request, misleading renewal notice
3	(2)	Reaffirmation	Declined contract on reaffirmation call, do not recall receiving reaffirmation call, attempt to reaffirm during 10-day cooling off period, person not authorized to reaffirm
4	(5)	Cancellation Charges	Charge for exiting contract too high, charges unfairly applied (e.g. moving with no service at new location)
5	(4)	Misrepresentation of Identity	Agent claimed affiliation with government, utility or Ontario Energy Board
6	(7)	Cancellation Request Not Processed	1—2 billing cycles has passed without cancellation, company has no record of cancellation request
7	(6)	General Contract Issues	
8	(9)	Signed by Unauthorized Person	Contract signed by family member other than spouse, person who does not reside at the address, unauthorized employee or non-account holder roommate / tenant
9	(8)	Misrepresentation of Price	Agent guaranteed savings, consumer told no fee to cancel, agent compared contract price to only a portion of regulated rate (e.g. highest TOU period)
10	(10)	Disputed Signature	Account holder or spouse's name signed on contract but is alleged not to be their signature

Top 10 Issues Raised – Utility & Other

Rank	(Rank Last Quarter)	Issue Raised	Examples
1	(1)	Billing	Errors in billing amount, no bills received, transfer of arrears from other customer
2	(2)	Smart Meters / Time of Use	Do not want a smart meter, concern with TOU prices or periods, increased bill amount with TOU prices
3	(3)	Rate Issues	Concern with changes to rates, incorrect rate applied, late payment charges, retroactive charges
4	(4)	Disconnection / Reconnection / New Connections	Disagree with disconnection policy, notice of disconnection not received, disconnected without cause, concern with reconnection schedule or charges
5	(6)	Security Deposits	Disagree with amount requested, consumer feels deposit requested after disconnection for non-payment is unfair, additional deposit requested by utility, not provided option to pay over 4 billing periods
6	(7)	Meters	Meter read incorrect, new meter registering higher consumption, dispute meter testing results
7	(--)	Estimated Billing	Estimated bills use over or under-estimated consumption, true-up bills are too high, do not like use of estimated billing
8	(8)	Utilities General	
9	(9)	Utility Service Quality	Frequency of power outages, damage to property, no response to letters / calls, long phone wait times, not notified of planned outages
10	(5)	OEB Bill Insert	Asking for clarification on content, comments on the timing of when they received the insert, unsure who the insert was from (OEB or utility)

Consumer Complaints

The OEB encourages consumers with a complaint about their utility, electricity retailer or natural gas marketer to contact the company first to try and resolve the complaint.

If the consumer has contacted the company but the complaint has not been resolved to the satisfaction of the consumer, the consumer may file the complaint with the OEB's Consumer Relations group. Consumer Relations will ensure the OEB has authority or jurisdiction in the area of the consumer's complaint, and advise the consumer of the complaint resolution process.

Once a consumer complaint is filed, the OEB contacts the company, providing them with a summary of the consumer's complaint and asking for the company's response. Generally companies have 21 days to respond.

The following chart shows the broad categories of complaints received by Consumer Relations for the months July through September 2010.

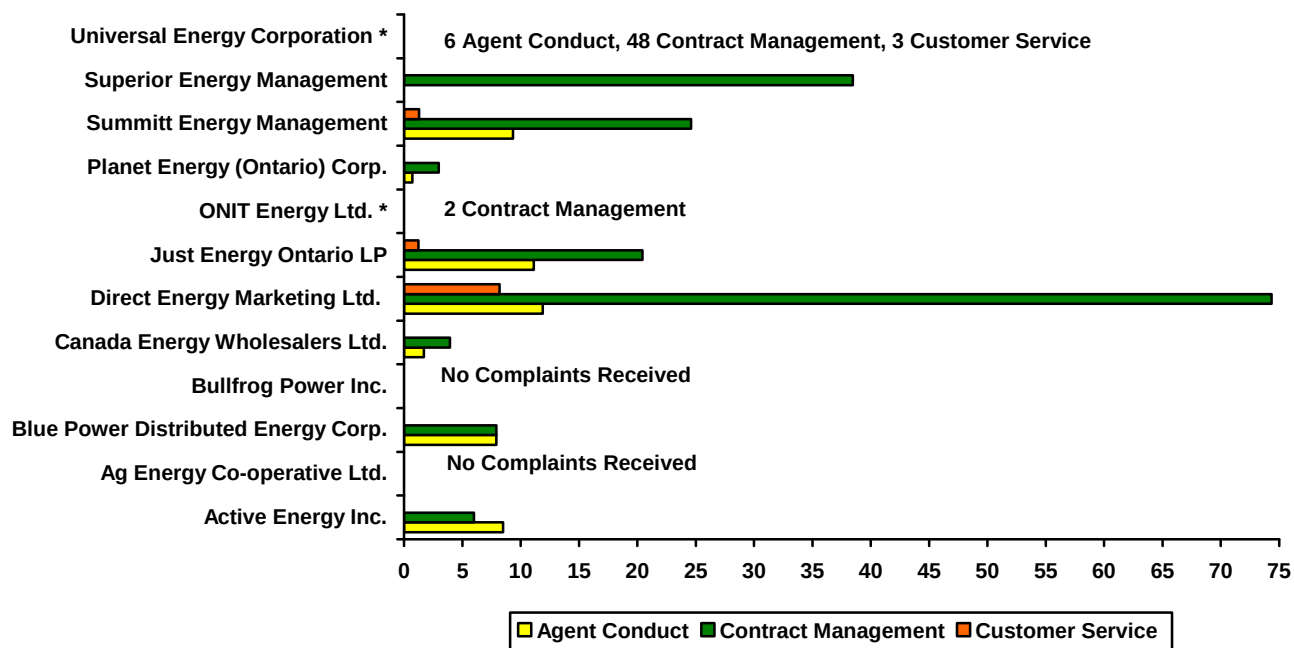
Retailer / Marketer—Contract Issues	832
Retailer / Marketer—Agent Conduct	271
Utility	354
Retailer / Marketer—Customer Service	57
<u>Other</u>	<u>35</u>
Total	1,549

The charts on the next page show complaints against Retailers and Marketers broken out by company based on the number of complaints received per 1,000 new enrollments and renewals in the period. Information on enrollments and renewals used for this purpose are reported by the retailers and marketers and may not have been independently reviewed or audited by the OEB.

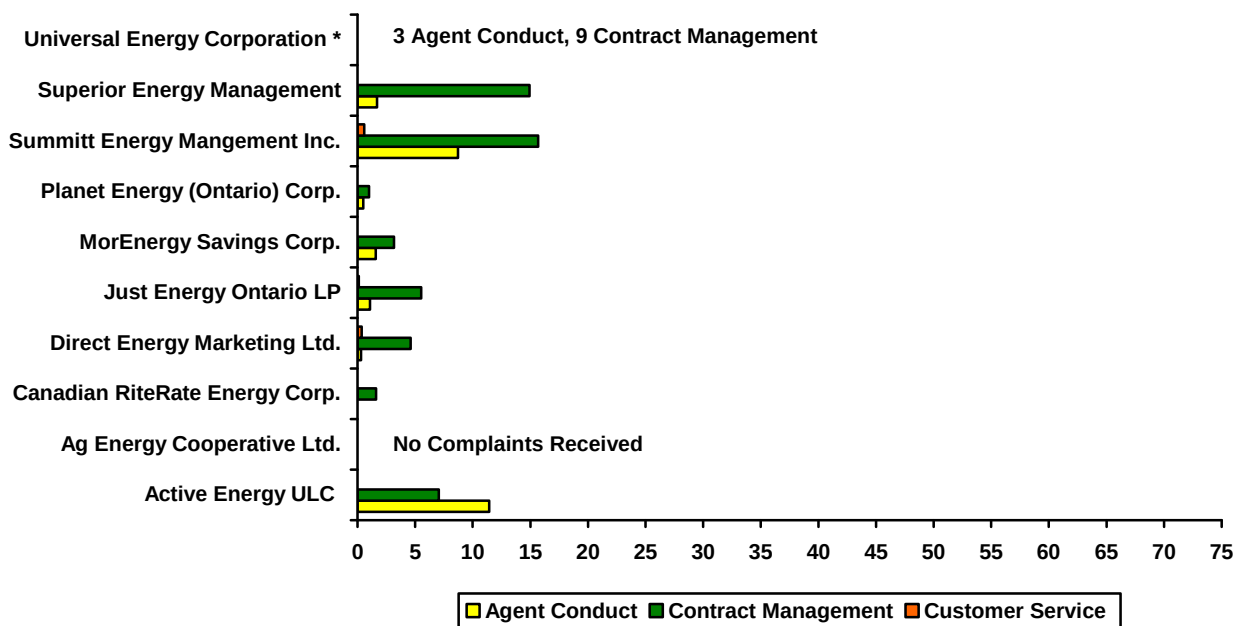
If the retailer or marketer did not enroll or renew any consumers during the reporting period, the chart will show the number of consumer complaints received over the period.

Low Volume Consumer Complaints Received by the OEB (per 1,000 new and renewed customers enrolled)

Electricity Sector



Natural Gas Sector



*no new or renewed customer enrolment numbers reported– total number of complaints received by OEB shown

Escalated Consumer Complaints

Consumer complaints are escalated when no resolution has been reached through the initial complaint process.

Staff may make enquiries and gather information, as appropriate, to mediate or resolve the complaint.

During this process, staff determines whether there are reasonable grounds to suggest that a licensee has contravened or is likely to contravene its legal or regulatory obligations (see “Compliance Management” on next page).

Escalated Complaints Reviewed and Closed: **384**

Escalated complaints typically involve the following types of issues:

Natural gas and electricity distributors – billing practices such as: estimation practices, meter readings, late payment charges and security deposit calculations.

Electricity retailers and natural gas marketers – contract management and processing issues as well as sales agent conduct complaints.

Staff also monitors responses from licensees to first level complaints to ensure consumers receive an appropriate response. During the quarter, staff closed **946** complaints resolved by the licensees.

Compliance Management

Staff reviewing and/or attempting to resolve an escalated consumer complaint may identify an issue that could impact many consumers, or encounter a situation where the licensee disputes any wrongdoing. In these cases, a formal compliance file may be opened.

Incidents that involve more serious allegations of wrongdoing, like a disputed signature, may also automatically result in the opening of a formal compliance file.

In these cases, staff will assess whether, and to what extent, a regulated energy company may have breached a legal or regulatory obligation. In other words, staff determines whether there is sufficient evidence to suggest that a company may not be complying with its legal or regulatory obligations.

In addition to originating from escalated consumer complaints, compliance files can also originate from a staff inspection into the activities of a licensee, an allegation made by a third party, or a concern related to a licensee's general policies and business practices.

The following table shows the number of active compliance cases under review during the quarter, including those that have been completed this quarter and the number that are ongoing.

	Electricity	Natural Gas
Open from previous quarter	5	5
Opened in this quarter	2	8
Completed in this quarter	5	8
Open at end of this quarter	2	5

To learn more about the Board's compliance process, visit the OEB website at <http://www.ontarioenergyboard.ca/OEB/Industry/Rules+and+Requirements/Regulatory+Policy+and+Compliance/Compliance+and+Enforcement+Process>

Most compliance cases underway or completed during the quarter involved an allegation of a disputed signature on a retail supply contract.

During the quarter, retailers and marketers reported the cancellation of more than **50** customer contracts resulting in reimbursement amounts of approximately **\$75,000**.

Market Participant Enquiries

An important element in achieving compliance is ensuring that licensees are aware of and understand their regulatory obligations. To facilitate the informal resolution of potential issues, the Board has established a process through which market participants will receive a timely response from Board staff to any questions they may have.

The following table shows the total number of such enquiries received by OEB staff in the quarter.

July	August	September
70	76	83

The principal areas of enquiry included:

- Deferral Accounts
- Licensing Requirements
- Incentive Rate Mechanism

Consumer Outreach

Last year, the OEB introduced a focused Consumer Communications and Outreach Plan aimed at informing residential and small business consumers about the energy sector, their options for energy supply and the OEB's role in facilitating the resolution of consumer issues. Some of the achievements over the last year include community tour days, meetings with staff at MPP constituency offices and with utility staff to discuss consumer issues as well as general information materials on the OEB and the energy sector, what to know about energy contracts and utility bill inserts.

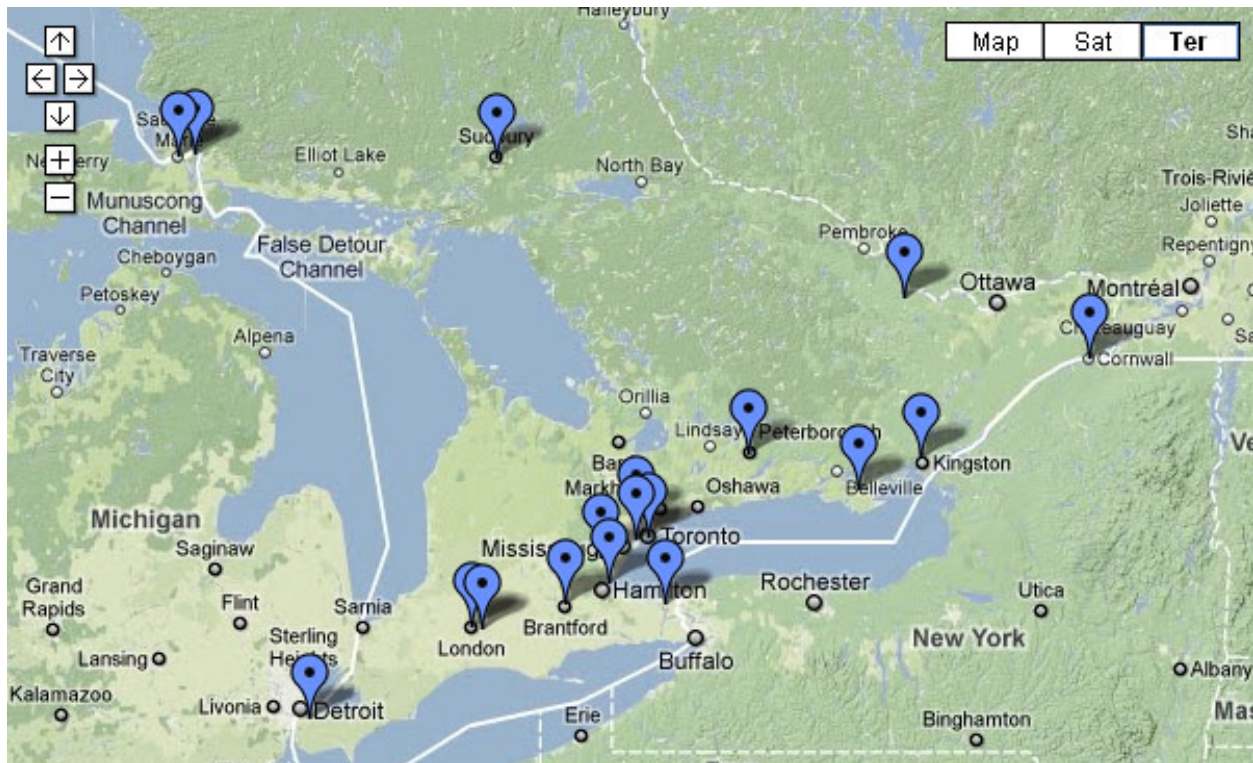
The OEB has also introduced an updated consumer section on its website with plain language content on your utility, energy contracts, access to newsletters and brochures and information on how the OEB works with you.

A special feature of the site is an **energy calculator** that allows consumers to compare energy prices online. All you need to do is pick your utility, enter your monthly electricity or natural gas usage and you'll see an estimate of your bill. You can even compare your utility bill to what you would pay on a retailer or marketer contract.

Over the next year the OEB plans to continue its efforts delivering information to consumers. This year's initiatives include a number of new information brochures, more online tools and community outreach throughout the year.

If you would like an OEB representative to provide your region or group with useful information on topics like how energy prices are set, participating in Board processes or how to make an informed choice on energy contracts please contact us using the information on the following page





Recent OEB consumer outreach locations.

How to Contact the Ontario Energy Board

Consumer Relations:

1-877-632-2727 (toll-free within Ontario)

416-314-2455 (within the GTA or outside Ontario)

consumerrelations@ontarioenergyboard.ca