

## PURPOSE OF THIS PLAN

This plan provides a recommended approach to announcing the Consumer Charter, new OEB website, and other consumer protection initiatives in April, 2017.

## WHAT THIS PLAN INCLUDES

- Strategic Considerations
- Recommended Approach
- Tactics
- Draft news release

## STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

1. There is the potential for public confusion and media fatigue given the number of planned or potential announcements for April 2017. These include:

- An executive summary of the Consumer Panel Report developed for release to the public, which has now been received from Ipsos;
- The new OEB website, to be launched by the end of March, 2017;
- The Consumer Charter, which will be launched in conjunction with the new OEB website and include a Did-You-Know-style series of questions designed to engage and educate the public on the rights in the Charter;
- New OESP eligibility criteria, which will be launched with a major public relations and advertising campaign in late April;
- New time-of-use rates will come into effect on May 1 and will be picked up by media the third week of April; and
- The Customer Service Rules review, which the OEB committed to launch in the near future in its February letter to utilities banning winter disconnections.

2. Several of these initiatives are linked:

- The Consumer Charter and online consumer education survey will be launched on the new OEB website.
- The Charter and new website are key outcomes of the Consumer Panel's work over the past 18 months.
- The Customer Service Rules Review will be informed by the rights in the Consumer Charter.

3. Some initiatives will be of more media and public interest than others.

The Consumer Charter, new OESP eligibility criteria, and Customer Service rules review should attract more media attention than the launch of the new website and the Consumer Panel report.

## RECOMMENDED APPROACH

1. April (first or second week) – Combine the announcement of the Consumer Charter, launch of the new website and Consumer Panel report.

Rationale: The three initiatives are directly related. The Consumer Charter and the related online “did-you-know” survey will help create interest and drive more traffic to the new OEB website than a stand-alone announcement of the launch of a new OEB website would. Because the new website was a key outcome of the Consumer Panel, any possible criticism of the OEB for spending money on a new website rather than for other purposes can be dampened or eliminated.

2. April (second or third week) – Announce the review of Customer Service Rules in mid-April, prior to May 1, when the ban on winter disconnections ends and new OESP eligibility requirements go into effect.

Rationale: The review of Customer Service Rules is a key, high-profile initiative. In our February 2017 letter to utilities, we committed to launching the review in the near future. The Chair also signalled this review in her EDA speech on March 27<sup>th</sup>.

Launching the review prior to May 1, when utilities can begin disconnecting customers who are in arrears, will help address inevitable questions the OEB will face. The review is also a natural follow up and can build upon the Consumer Charter. There will also be a comprehensive consultation process for the rules review, which can be leveraged and communicated through earned media.

3. April (third week) – Announce Time-of-Use rates that go into effect May 1.

Rationale: Time-of-Use rates are normally announced in the third week in April, with a date tentatively scheduled for April 20. If the rates are in line with the rate of inflation, the announcement should not generate overly negative media coverage and should not disrupt other activities in this release plan.

4. April (last week) – Announce the new OESP eligibility rules to the media, prior to implementation on May 1 and the launch of an advertising campaign to increase awareness of the new rules.

Rationale: There will be significant media and public interest in the new OESP rules. Prior to the launch of the advertising campaign, earned media should be used to announce the initiative. In addition to informing stakeholders and the public, this will also explain why the OEB is spending money on a major advertising campaign and blunt potential criticism.

## TACTICS

|                                                   | Charter,<br>website | Rules Review | OESP | Time of<br>Use |
|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------|------|----------------|
| News Release                                      | ✓                   | ✓            | ✓    | ✓              |
| Backgrounder                                      | ✓                   | ✓            | ✓    | ✓              |
| Key Messages/Q&As                                 | ✓                   | ✓            | ✓    | ✓              |
| Paid digital advertising                          | ✓                   |              | ✓    |                |
| Outreach – Social Agencies (letters to agencies)  | ✓                   | ✓            | ✓    |                |
| Outreach – Utilities:                             |                     |              |      |                |
| ○ Chair’s speech to EDA March 27                  | ✓                   | ✓            |      |                |
| ○ Letter to utilities following each announcement | ✓                   | ✓            | ✓    | ✓              |
| Matte article                                     |                     |              | ✓    |                |
| Paid advertising                                  |                     |              | ✓    |                |
| Bill insert                                       |                     |              | ✓    |                |
| Employee notification                             | ✓                   | ✓            | ✓    | ✓              |

## DRAFT NEWS RELEASE

### **Ontario Energy Board introduces first Consumer Charter to bring together and better inform consumers about their rights**

**TORONTO, ONT. (DATE)** – A Consumer Charter that brings together the rights of Ontario’s energy consumers in a single, easily understood document for the first time, was released today by the Ontario Energy Board.

“We want consumers of electricity and natural gas to know that they have rights as well as responsibilities. The Charter helps us inform and educate consumers by bringing these together in an accessible, understandable document,” Rosemarie Leclair, Chair and CEO of the Ontario Energy Board, said.

The Charter includes six basic consumer rights including the right to

1. Safe and reliable service;
2. Accurate and timely bills;
3. Fair security deposit policies;
4. Fair disconnection and reconnection practices;
5. Fair, reasonable and timely complaint resolution processes; and
6. Personal privacy.

The Charter can be found on the new, more consumer-friendly OEB website also launched today to make it easier for consumers to find information they need to make informed decisions. Consumers can test their understanding of the Charter and provide feedback in an online questionnaire on the site.

The OEB will also review of Customer Service Rules that utilities must follow in dealing with their customers. These include rules on disconnections, complaint resolution, security deposits and other rights that are spelled out in the Charter.

The Consumer Charter and new website are key outcomes of a Consumer Panel that was created by the OEB in another first in late 2015.

“The Consumer Panel’s work was invaluable, particularly in the development of the Consumer Charter. The panel helped ensure that both the Charter and the website reflect the views of consumers and provide information they want and need. We will be consulting the panel as well as consumers and utilities extensively in our review of Customer Service Rules,” Leclair said.

The panel, composed of 100 residential and small business consumers from across Ontario, met quarterly over the past 18 months to provide a consumer perspective, insight and advice to the OEB on consumer protection measures. A report on the panel’s activities can be found on the OEB website at [oeb.ca](http://oeb.ca). The work on the Consumer Panel continues with new members being recruited.

In addition to the consumer panel, the OEB arranges meetings in the community on all rate applications from local utilities to ensure that residents have a say. All comments from the meetings are reviewed by the OEB in making a decision on the rate application. Since 2016, the OEB has held 16 community meetings, some of which have been attended by more than 100 consumers.

“Protecting Ontario’s energy consumers is at the heart of what the OEB does every day. We are giving consumers a stronger voice in the energy system and arming them with the information they need to make informed decisions and understand their rights,” Leclair said.

### **About the Ontario Energy Board**

The Ontario Energy Board is an independent and impartial public agency that regulates Ontario’s electricity and natural gas sectors. We are committed to empowering, engaging and protecting consumers and we make decisions that serve the public interest. Our goal is to promote a sustainable and efficient energy sector that provides consumers with reliable energy services at a reasonable cost.

-30-

### **Contact Us**

For more information, please refer to the attached backgrounder, visit the OEB website at [oeb.ca](http://oeb.ca) or contact us directly.

### **Media Inquiries**

Phone: 416-544-5171

Email: [oebmedia@oeb.ca](mailto:oebmedia@oeb.ca)

## OEB CONSUMER CHARTER SURVEY – COPY DECK FOR TRANSLATION

These questions are segmented by the key sections of the charter. In other words the consumer would see these questions by section not a full list as shown below. The goal is to educate and engage the consumer with the content. These are similar questions we used in the discussion guide for the Consumer Panel.

### SECTION 1 - HOW MUCH YOU KNOW ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS AND YOUR ENERGY PROVIDER

Did you know, as an energy consumer in Ontario you have a number of rights, along with some responsibilities as set out in the OEB's new draft Consumer Charter[LINK]. The Charter has been drafted with input from the OEB's Consumer Panel [LINK TO PANEL], industry and stakeholders.

We would now like to hear your views. Do you find the OEB's Consumer Charter helpful? Is information missing? If so, what? Would you like to see more information about a particular right or responsibility? If so, what?

Please take a few minutes to read with the Charter and fill out the survey which should take about 10 minutes to complete.

Thank you for your time. Your feedback will help ensure we at the OEB are doing everything we can to protect your interests.

1. Did you read the *Consumer Charter*?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If you answered NO, please click on the link above to read the Charter and then come back and complete the survey.

### Your Electricity and Natural Gas Companies

1a. Before asking about the Charter, we want to know how well you understand the roles of electricity and natural gas companies. Here are some descriptions which we'd like you to read and then answer the questions below.

**Electricity & Natural Gas Utilities (also known as distributors):** Utilities are responsible for delivering electricity and natural gas (energy) to your home at a rate approved by the OEB. Your utilities are determined by where your property is located. Their services include planning, construction, operation and maintenance of their respective distribution networks. They are also responsible for supplying your energy unless you choose to buy your energy from an electricity retailer and a gas marketer under contract. For most consumers, the electricity and natural gas prices charged by utilities are set by the OEB.

**Unit Sub-Meter Providers:** If you live in a condo or an apartment that has its own individual meter and your electricity bill comes from a company other than the local electricity utility, you are a customer of a unit sub-meter provider. Unit sub-meter providers' responsibilities are

similar to those of electricity utilities.

**Electricity Retailers & Gas Marketers (also known as energy retailers):** In Ontario, you have the option of buying your electricity and natural gas from your utilities or from electricity retailers and gas marketers, if you sign a retail contract. The prices charged by electricity retailers and gas markets are not set by the OEB. You will pay the price you and the company agreed to in the contract. The retail energy contract is only for the electricity and natural gas that you use. You will still pay your utilities to have electricity and natural gas delivered to your home.

2. Were you aware of the roles played by your electricity and natural gas companies described above?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ Somewhat
  - ☐ No
3. Is the description of this role easy to understand?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ Somewhat
  - ☐ No
4. What did you find was not easy to understand?
  - ☐ Role of Electricity & Natural Gas Utilities (also known as distributors)?
  - ☐ Role of Unit Sub-meter providers?
  - ☐ Role Electricity Retailers & Gas Marketers (also known as energy retailers)?
5. Do you have any additional comments on this section?

## SECTION 2 - YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO SAFE & RELIABLE SERVICE

### **You have the right to safe & reliable service.**

Your utility is responsible for the safe connection of your home to their distribution network and for providing you with safe and reliable service without unreasonable interruption. As part of this service, your utility is required to make necessary repairs, replacements and improvements to their equipment.

6. Is this description of your right to safe and reliable service easy to understand?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ Somewhat
  - ☐ No
7. What did you find was not easy to understand?
  - ☐ The description of your rights as an energy consumer
  - ☐ What this right means to you as a Residential consumer of electricity

- ☐ What this right means to you as a Residential consumer of natural gas (if applicable)
8. Have you ever had an experience where you believed you did not have safe or reliable service?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
9. Did you contact your utility about the situation?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
10. If yes, were you satisfied with your utility's response?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ No
11. Can you describe the situation (optional):
12. Do you have any additional comments on this section? If not, please click "next" and move on to the next section.

### SECTION 3 - YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO ACCURATE AND TIMELY BILLS

#### **You have the right to accurate and timely bills.**

Your utility is required to issue accurate and timely bills, but billing errors may occur at times. You should know that:

- ☐ You can question the accuracy of your bill.
  - ☐ If you were over-billed, your utility must credit you with the amount mistakenly billed, for a period of up to two years.
13. Is the description of your right to accurate and timely bills easy to understand?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ No
14. What did you find was not easy to understand?
- ☐ The description of your right to accurate and timely bills
- ☐ What this right means to you as a Residential consumer of electricity
- ☐ What this right means to you as a Residential consumer of natural gas (if applicable)
15. Have you ever had an experience where you believed you did not have accurate or timely bills?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
16. Did you contact your utility about the situation?

☐ Yes

☐ No

17. If so, were you satisfied with your utility's response?

☐ Yes

☐ Somewhat

☐ No

18. Can you describe the situation (optional):

19. Do you have additional comments on this section? If not, please click "next" and move on to the next section.

#### SECTION 4 - YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO FAIR SECURITY DEPOSIT POLICIES

You have the right to fair security deposit policies.

To secure payment of future charges, your utility can ask for a security deposit when you initially apply for service or if you fail to maintain a good payment history. You should know that:

- You have the right to pay your electricity utility the required security deposit in equal instalments over a six-month period. Gas utilities generally provide this option to their customers as well.

- You have the right to get your deposit back once you have shown one year of good payment history.

20. Is the description of the right to fair security deposit policies easy to understand?

☐ Yes

☐ Somewhat

☐ No

21. What did you find was not easy to understand?

☐ The description of your right to fair security deposit policies?

☐ What this right means to you as a Residential consumer of electricity

☐ What this right means to you as a Residential consumer of natural gas (if applicable)

22. Have you ever had an experience where you believed your utility's security deposit was unfair?

☐ Yes

☐ No

23. Did you contact your utility about the situation?

☐ Yes

☐ No

24. If so, were you satisfied with your utility's response?

☐ Yes

☐ Somewhat

☐ No

25. Can you describe the situation? (optional):

26. Did you get your deposit back after a year?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't know/can't remember

27. Do you have additional comments on this section? If not, please click "next" and move on to the next section.

## SECTION 5 - YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO FAIR DISCONNECTION & RECONNECTION PRACTICES

### **You have the right to fair disconnection & reconnection practices**

Your utility can disconnect your service for a number of reasons such as failing to pay your security deposit, failing to pay your bill, or failing to follow through on payment arrangements. You should know that:

- You have the right to advance written notice of disconnection which should contain information about the disconnection process including the dates between which the service can be disconnected and available payment options to avoid the pending disconnection.

- You have the right to a timely reconnection of your service once you have made the required payment. Utilities are required to reconnect services within **two business days** from receipt of required payments in most cases.

28. Is the description of the right to fair disconnection and reconnection practices easy to understand?

☐ Yes

☐ Somewhat

☐ No

29. What did you find was not easy to understand?

☐ The description of your right to fair disconnection and reconnection practices?

☐ What this right means to you as a Residential consumer of electricity

☐ What this right means to you as a Residential consumer of natural gas (if applicable)

30. Have you ever had your electricity or natural gas service disconnected?

☐ Yes

☐ No

31. Can you describe the situation? (optional):

32. Do you believe the utility's disconnection policy was fair?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ No
- ☐ If no:
  - ☐ How much advance notice were you given?

[Open ended comment box]

- ☐ How did you receive the notice?
- [Open ended comment box]

- ☐ How would you prefer to receive the notice?
- [Open ended comment box]

33. Was your service reconnected within two business days after you made the required payment?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't remember

34. Do you have any additional comments on this section? If not, please click "next" and move on to the next section.

## SECTION 6 - YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO FAIR, REASONABLE AND TIMELY COMPLAINT RESOLUTION PROCESSES

**You have the right to fair, reasonable, and timely complaint resolution processes.**

Electricity and natural gas companies are required to handle customer complaints in a fair, reasonable and timely manner. If you have a complaint about your electricity and natural gas company, you should contact them and try to work it out with them first. If your complaint is not resolved to your satisfaction, you can contact the OEB or file a complaint. The OEB will work with you and the company to facilitate the resolution of your complaint.

35. Is the description of the right to a fair, reasonable, and timely complaint resolution process easy to understand.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ No

36. What did you find was not easy to understand?

- ☐ The description of your right to a fair, reasonable, and timely complaint resolution process?

- ☐ What this right means to you as a Residential consumer of electricity
  - ☐ What this right means to you as a Residential consumer of natural gas (if applicable)
37. Have you ever complained to your electricity or natural gas utility?
- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
  - ☐ Don't know/can't remember
38. Were you satisfied with your electricity or natural gas company's response?
- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ Somewhat
  - ☐ No
39. Can you describe the situation? (optional):

Do you have any additional comments on this section? If not, please click "next" and move on to the next section.

## SECTION 7 - YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO PERSONAL PRIVACY

You have the right to personal privacy.

**That means, your electricity and natural gas company must protect your personal information and not share it with anyone without proper permission.**

41. Is this right clear to you?
- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ Somewhat
  - ☐ No
42. What did you find was not easy to understand?
- ☐ The description of this right?
  - ☐ What this right means to you as a Residential consumer of electricity
  - ☐ What this right means to you as a Residential consumer of natural gas (if applicable)
  - ☐ What this right means to you as a Small Business consumer of electricity (if applicable)
  - ☐ What this right means to you as a Small Business consumer of natural gas (if applicable)
43. Have you ever had an experience where your information was shared without proper permission?
- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
  - ☐

44. Did you contact the utility about the situation?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

45. If so, were you satisfied with your electricity or natural gas company's response?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ No

46. Can you describe the situation? (optional):

47. Do you have any additional comments on this section? If not, please click "next" and move on to the next section.

48. Do you have any other comments about the Consumer Charter and what it means to you?

**Help us understand more about you. These questions are optional.**

**49. How old are you?**

- ☐ 18-29 Years
- ☐ 30-39 Years
- ☐ 40-49 Years
- ☐ 50-59 Years
- ☐ 60-69 Years
- ☐ 70+ Years

**50. What gender do you identify as?**

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other (non-binary or transgender)
- ☐ Prefer not to say

**51. What is your annual household income?**

- ☐ \$0 to \$25,000
- ☐ \$25,000 to \$49,000
- ☐ \$50,000 to \$74,000
- ☐ \$75,000 to \$99,000
- ☐ \$100,000 to \$124,000
- ☐ \$124,000 to \$149,000
- ☐ \$150,000 +

**52. Are you the individual responsible for paying energy bills at your residence or small business?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

**53. Would you like to receive more information on our consumer charter, or receive updates from the OEB on our work to protect consumers? If so, please fill out the form below.**

Name

City/Town

ZIP/Postal Code

Email Address

Phone Number