

## **Washington Recaps 2012 Consumer Complaints**

### **Local News**

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - State regulators announced their annual list of industries that bring in the most consumer complaints. Regulated electric and natural gas companies had the most consumer complaints filed against them in 2012, while telecommunications companies came in a close second. In 2012, the Utilities and Transportation Commission's (UTC) Consumer Protection staff received 589 complaints against regulated electric and natural gas companies from customers with billing disputes, disconnect threats, quality of service and customer service issues. Telecom companies followed closely behind with 516 consumer complaints filed against regulated landline telephone companies in 2012 for billing disputes, disconnect threats, quality of service and customer service issues. The solid waste industry remained a distant third for 2012 with 187 complaints filed against regulated garbage and recycling companies, although complaints were up 123 percent from the previous year. The rise in solid waste complaints was due to Waste Management's eight-day labor dispute in the summer of 2012. UTC Consumer Protection staff saved consumers more than \$120,000 in 2012 through customer credits and refunds. They investigated 1,343 complaints for customers of regulated companies, and recorded more than 550,000 violations for failure to comply with state rules and laws. In addition to resolving complaints, the UTC's Consumer Protection Help Line received about 10,000 telephone calls, and 1,600 emails and letters from the public. Staff helped consumers find utility assistance, provided information on consumer rights and assisted consumers in locating permitted residential moving companies. The UTC regulates the rates and services of telecommunications companies; investor-owned electric utilities, natural gas and water companies; garbage-collection haulers; residential moving and charter-bus companies; and commercial ferries. The UTC protects consumers by ensuring that utility and transportation services are fairly priced, available, reliable, and safe.