



Guide to Formal Complaints and Alternative Dispute Resolution

What is Alternative Dispute Resolution?

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) means mediation and early neutral evaluation to help opposing parties resolve a conflict without a formal decision by a court or agency. ADR can achieve results that a court or agency could not order, save you time, money, and avoid the complexities of the formal process.

ADR can be used together with a Formal Complaint. In some cases, ADR can be available before a Formal Complaint is filed.



What is a Formal Complaint?

A Formal Complaint is a written legal document that claims a utility regulated by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) has violated state laws or the CPUC's orders or rules. A Formal Complaint describes these violations, the injury suffered because of them, and the resolution requested from the CPUC.

Utility Informal Complaints

For billing, service, and other complaints related to a regulated utility, your first step is to contact the provider directly. If you cannot resolve the problem after talking with the utility's customer service, you may file an Informal Complaint with the CPUC at www.cpuc.ca.gov/complaints or 1-800-649-7570.



Who Can Complain?

You can file a Formal Complaint if you are a person, organization, corporation, association, or political body claiming that a public utility has violated laws or the CPUC's orders or rules that have led to an injury for which you are seeking resolution.



Can the CPUC Help Me?

Through the Formal Complaint process, the CPUC can order a utility to take corrective action on a variety of issues, including an adjustment to your bill. The CPUC can also impose fines and order reparations if a service, which you have paid for, has not been provided.

The CPUC is not allowed to award damages for personal injury, property damage, emotional distress, or loss of wages or profits. To request compensation for damages, you must file a claim in a civil court.





Your Formal Complaint Will Become Public Record

All Formal Complaints filed with the CPUC become public record and may be posted on the CPUC's website. Any information you provide in the Formal Complaint, including, but not limited to, your name, address, city, state, zip code, telephone number, email address, and the facts of your case, may be available online for later public viewing.



Useful Tips for Filing a Formal Complaint

- Describe the **specific acts** you are complaining about in plain language.
- Describe the **facts** that justify your complaint.
- Describe the **injury** the acts you are complaining about have caused you.
- Describe the exact **relief** you are requesting because of the injury you have suffered.

In your Formal Complaint you must:

- **Propose** a proceeding category for the Formal Complaint (e.g., "Adjudicatory" or "Rate-setting." Most complaints are Adjudicatory unless they challenge the reasonableness of a utility's rate).
- **State** whether there is a need for a hearing.
- **State** the issues to be considered.
- **Propose** a schedule.

Fill out the form for filing a Formal Complaint:



ONLINE: www.cpuc.ca.gov/formalcomplaintinfo

Request a paper copy from the CPUC's Public Advisor's Office:



EMAIL: public.advisor@cpuc.ca.gov



CALL: 866-849-8390 or 415-703-2074

TTY 866-836-7825



How Do I Request Alternative Dispute Resolution?

The CPUC's Administrative Law Judge Division administers the ADR program. Trained, experienced Administrative Law Judges serve as neutral mediators and facilitators between opposing parties in a dispute.

To request ADR, you can ask the Administrative Law Judge assigned to the initial Formal Complaint proceeding, file a written request, contact the ADR coordinator, or contact the Public Advisor's Office for assistance.

If you have additional questions, contact the CPUC's Public Advisor's Office:



EMAIL: public.advisor@cpuc.ca.gov



CALL: 866-849-8390 or 415-703-2074

