

Section D: Customer Service Guidelines

1

Introduction

1.1 Rationale and Scope

- 1.1.1 The Board, through this Customer Service Guidelines (CSG) guarantees that consumers shall be protected against the provision of the water and sewerage services which are hazardous to the customers' life and property. The customers' interest shall always be given due consideration.
- 1.1.2 It is the objective of these Guidelines to protect the customer against hazards to health and safety, to inform and educate the customers on the standards for the levels of service and conditions of service in order for them to better protect their rights, thereby promoting a customer-focused approach in the provision of water and sewerage services.
- 1.1.3 The Guidelines also aims to inform the Customers of its role in supporting the provision of a safe and sustainable water supply.

1.2 General Principles

- 1.2.1 The protection of customers' rights emanates from the Amendments to the NWSDB Act which states that:

83A (1) The water supply and sewerage services carried on by the Board shall be regulated by the Public Utilities Commission of Sri Lanka (hereinafter referred to as "the Commission") created under PUCSL Act No. 35 of 2002.

The Commission shall exercise the following powers and functions as the economic, safety and technical regulator of the Board, in a manner which it considers is best calculated to protect the interests of the Board and consumers, by promoting efficiency, economy and safety:

Investigate, mediate and resolve customer complaints and disputes;

83C The Commission shall prepare in consultation with the Minister and the Board, the Customer Service Guidelines setting out the rights and obligations of consumers in relation to the Board.

- 1.2.2 The Commission in regulating customer service may also refer to: No .L.D. – O. 44/2002 of 2002, Part VI Consumer Protection of the PUCSL Act which states that :

"28. The Commission shall in the exercise of its powers under any industry Act or any regulation made thereunder, protect the rights of the consumer-

- (a) against the marketing of goods and services which are hazardous to life and property;
- (b) against unfair trade practices;
- (c) to be heard and to be assured that their interests will receive due consideration; and
- (d) to provide consumer education."

2

Services Provided by the NWSDB

2.1 Water Supply Services

2.1.1 Supply of Drinking Water

New Connections from Mains:

- (i) Customers who request a connection and whose property lies within 25 meters of a water supply distribution main (network) will be provided a connection unless there are significant and demonstrable difficulties.
- (ii) The installations of water connections shall be completed within seven (7) days from the time of payment of the connection charge for properties within 25 meters and two (2) weeks for properties more than 25 meters.
- (iii) Customers applying for a connection shall be informed whenever it will take more time than necessary to install a water or sewerage connection from some constraint in the availability of resources or for some other reason.
- (iv) Customers' reasonable needs for the supply of drinking water will be provided by the Board except in the following circumstances:
 - in the case of planned or unplanned interruptions
 - in cases where the Board has to restrict or discontinue supply
 - in case of events beyond the control of the Board

Provision of Water Other than Through Mains

- (v) Customers shall be provided water supply other than through a water main in circumstances where the supplies through a water main have been or will be interrupted for more than 24 hours or supplies through a water main have been or will be subject to contamination. The charges for these services shall not exceed the approved rates for piped water supplies. In cases where no connection to a water main exists, the Board may make a supply of water available to its customers at a rate equal to the costs reasonably and efficiently incurred by the Board in supplying such water. The Board shall also determine the cost for each individual and such charges shall be included in the monthly bill.

2.1.2 Drinking Water Quality

- (i) The water supply that will be provided is either chlorinated and/or treated using generally acceptable water treatment processes to ensure the safety and potability of the water supply.
- (ii) The customers are assured that the drinking water at the connection point of their properties meet the following standards or applicable standards as may be revised by the Bureau of Standards:

Physical requirements: The water that will be provided shall meet the physical requirements prescribed in Table 1 of SLS 614: Part 1: 1983.

Chemical Requirements: The water to be supplied shall meet the chemical requirements prescribed in Table 2 of SLS 614: Part 1: 1983. At its discretion, the Commission may require the Board to test for the optional parameters given in tables 4 and 5 of SLS 614: Part 1: 1983 depending on the location of the water sources.

Bacteriological requirements: The water to be supplied to customers shall meet the bacteriological requirements prescribed in clauses 3.1.1 through 3.1.4 of SLS 614: Part 1.

2.1.3 Service Reliability

- (i) Water Quantity – Customers will be provided sufficient and adequate supply of water considering the minimum lifeline requirements.
- (ii) Water Pressure and Number of Hours of Water Supply – The customers will receive adequate supply of water at a minimum of 7 meters line pressure except for identified low pressure areas and for at least 6 hours a day.
- (iii) Service Interruptions (Planned) - The Board shall notify all affected customers through print media, radio or television and any other means that will immediately convey the message to all customers within 48 hours prior to any planned temporary service interruptions. The Board shall limit the duration of any service interruption (e.g. replacement of motor pump) to a maximum of three (3) days.
- (iv) Service Interruptions (Unplanned) - In case of unplanned service interruptions, the Board shall take immediate action to restore service to normal levels within 24 hours or within a reasonable period of time depending on the extent of work that is needed to be done.
- (v) The Board shall undertake all necessary means, such as rationing through tankers, etc. to deliver water to its customers in case of prolonged service breakdowns. It shall also have emergency provision of water supply in times of emergency.

2.2 Sewerage Services

2.2.1 Connecting to a Public Sewer

- (i) Customers connected to the Board's water system shall be offered sewer connections to the Board's sewer lines for either domestic sewage or industrial effluents whenever within the capacity of the system. Upon request from an owner or occupant of premises located in the Board's service area for connection to a public sewer, the Board shall install the connection within two (2) weeks from receipt of payment for the application of a new connection.

2.2.2. Enforcing Wastewater Discharges into the Sewerage System

- (i) If a commercial or industrial customer violates the pretreatment standards set out in the Customer Service Agreement, the Commission shall ensure that the Board has taken the following actions:

Customers will be notified in writing of the violation indicating the action to be taken by the customer and penalties to apply in cases of non-action. A copy of this notice should be filed with the CEA.

Should the customer fail to rectify the violation, the Board has recourse to any one or a combination of the following actions depending on the severity of the violation.

- Requesting the CEA to take action against a client on the violation of its regulations;
 - Requesting the CEA for approval to cut off its water connection; (i.e., the requirement of obtaining the certification from CEA based on the misconduct)
 - Disconnecting the sewerage connection of the customer after due notice has been given.
- (ii) The Board shall draw up and submit to the Commission for its approval a table of penalties to be imposed on customers for violation of pretreatment standards.

3

Informing the Customers

3.1 Consulting and Educating the Customers

- 3.1.1 Informing and educating the customers will enable customers' understanding of the Board's operations and will encourage support and participation to the Board's programs and activities.
- 3.1.2 Toward this end, the Board shall endeavor to undertake a continuing information and education campaign of customers on matters that will contribute to the effective operations of the Board and have a direct effect on customers such as ensuring a safe and sustainable water supply and sewerage services.
- 3.1.3 The Board shall develop and implement a customer service program that will promote good customer relations and enhance customer satisfaction. The program shall be reviewed annually and updated to respond to the changing needs of the customers.

3.2 Information to be Provided to the Customers

- 3.2.1 Customers shall be informed basically on the following matters:
 - (i) Services provided with its charges and fees and service standards through the provisions in the CSA
 - (ii) Operating policies and procedures on billing and collection
 - (iii) Results of bacteriological and other water tests
 - (iv) Schedule of existing and proposed tariff adjustments
 - (v) Programs and activities of the Board relating to water conservation
 - (vi) Other Matters that will affect the customers and where their support will be needed
- 3.2.2 Tariff Adjustments
 - (i) The Board shall inform the customers through displays or by any visible means of any plans or application for tariff adjustment by the Board. The notice will contain information on the existing and the proposed tariffs and the means for raising issues and concerns relating to the adjustment.
 - (ii) Where it may be required by the regulator, the Commission, to hold public consultations in case of proposed tariff adjustments the customers shall be sufficiently and appropriately consulted.
 - (iii) Customers shall be informed at least 2 weeks before the holding of any planned consultation on proposed tariff adjustments by the Board through written notices and other means.
- 3.2.3 Operating Policies and Procedures on Billing and Collection
 - (i) Customers will be informed through brochures handed out and notices posted in the premises of the Board, and/or through inquiry to the Customer Service Officer of the Board's systems and procedures on the following:

Applications for new connections, disconnections and reconnections;
Schedule of existing water tariff and procedures for the calculation of water bills and application of other service fees, charges and discounts for advanced payments;
Policies on collection such as penalty for late payment of bills and disconnection of delinquent accounts;
Where and how to pay the bills;
Policy on tampering of meters, stolen meters and water pilferage;
How and where to file request for other services

3.2.4 Results of Water Quality Tests

- (i) Results of bacteriological tests and physical and chemical analysis test shall be made available to customers by posting these documents in a conspicuous place within the Board's office within 3 days from its release. Customers may also inquire from the Board the results of said tests.

3.2.5 Internal Disputes Handling Procedures

- (i) An internal complaint handling procedures for receiving, responding and resolving complaints shall be established and maintained in every Board office at the national, regional and area levels. Customers shall be informed on how the system works, where and how to file complaints.
- (ii) Customers shall be provided pamphlets that give information on how complaints will be responded to by the Board.

3.2.6 Performance Reporting

- (i) Reports relating to the evaluation of the performance of the Board by the Commission shall be made available to the customers at the offices of the Board. Separately, the Commission shall publish the results of its review and audits for the benefit of the customers. The customers shall be informed essentially on how the Board performed with regards its service obligations.

3.2.7 New Projects for Implementation

- (i) Customers will be informed of newly approved and funded projects, their timetable for implementation, the project's benefits to the customers and the inconveniences these projects will cause to the public.

3.3 Modes of Information

3.3.1 The Board shall use various forms of media and communication in informing and educating the customers. It may, among others, issue periodic newsletters informing the customers of the current activities and programs of the Board; publish news and information regarding the Board in national and local newspapers; make radio and television announcements.

3.3.2 It shall issue pamphlets on key information that a customer has to know such as procedures on the payment of water and sewerage bills; where and how to file complaints and water conservation programs of the Board.

3.4 Customer Service Records

- 3.4.1 The Board shall maintain sufficient record systems that will enable it to record and measure its performance against the Customer Service Indicators.
- 3.4.2 It shall submit quarterly and annual report of its performance on customer service to the Commission in a form that will be agreed with the Board.

4

Service Requests and Complaints

4.1 Where and How to File Service Requests and Complaints

4.1.1 Where to File Complaints

- (i) Generally, all SRCs must be filed with the appropriate OIC of local offices of the Board. The OIC shall log the SRC and take appropriate action within a specified timeframe (allowable response time). It is the responsibility of the OIC to record all genuine SRCs, whether or not it has the ability to implement the required remedies in the time allotted.
- (ii) Customers who are unhappy with the resolution of earlier complaints filed with the Board may go to the Consumer Consultative Council or to the Commission.

4.1.2 How to File Complaints

- (i) In handling, the following procedures shall be undertaken at the minimum.
 - (a) Receive and log the SRC¹
 - (b) Classify the SRC (technical, billing, public safety, others)
 - (c) Whenever needed, conduct field investigation
 - (d) Apply appropriate interventions
 - (e) Monitor SRC and keep customer informed of their SRC status
 - (f) Report unresolved SRCs to main office and inform customer why SRC is unsolvable
 - (g) Prepare monthly report on SRCs including unresolved SRCs.

4.2 Response Time

- (i) Response time is defined as the time elapsed from receipt of the SRC by the Board up to the satisfactory resolution of the same SRC. Each Regional Service Center (RSC) will establish their own response time for each type of complaint.

Types of Complaints	Response Time ²
a. High Consumption (billing) Complaints <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Defective water meters - Incorrect meter reading - Connection categorization 	7 – 14 days
b. Payment Complaints <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Payment not correctly accredited to payee - Delayed accreditation of payment - Estimated bills 	At least 30 days

¹ Presently there is an on-going computerization project for Customer Service. The following modules will be installed – customer information module, customer grievance module and billing and recovery module.

² Refers to range of results from the consultation with the Board during the coaching/mentoring on customer service conducted on Oct.1, 2007.

Types of Complaints	Response Time ³
c. Water Quality Deviations	1 – 2 days
d. Service Level Deviations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No water - Low pressure 	1 – 7 days
e. Burst (water mains and sewer lines)	1 – 2 days
f. Leakage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Distribution mains - Service connections 	1 – 7 days
g. Illegal Connections	1 – 2 days
h. Public Safety <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open excavations/restoration works - Missing manhole covers 	1 – 14 days

4.3 Action on Complaints

In the event a complaint of overcharge is made by a customer, the Board shall act on the said complaint by accomplishing the following:

4.3.1 Complaints on Erroneous Meters

- (ii) Re-reading of the service meter for checking the meter reading or accuracy of the meter is done. If the accuracy of the meter is within standard, the complainant may be charged the cost of the investigation. If the inaccuracy of the meter was due to the tampering of the meter by the customer, the complainant will shoulder the cost of the investigation and the replacement of the meter.
- (iii) If necessary and upon request of the customer, inspection of plumbing works to determine possible internal plumbing leaks can be done.
- (iv) If accuracy of the meter is in question, the water meter shall be subjected to an accuracy test. Appropriate actions shall be done.

If the meter has to be replaced or recalibrated, such cost shall be borne by the Board

If meter shows over registration, the complainant will be refunded the amount equivalent to the actual registration minus the average registration for the past 3 months. The refund for the overcharging will cover a maximum of 2 months from the date of the complaint.

- (v) Should the complainant be unsatisfied with any ruling of the Board, the complainant may refer the disputed ruling to the Commission for resolution. In all cases, the complainant shall pay the amount of the disputed bill under protest until a final decision is reached by the Commission or the Court.

4.4 Refunds and Adjustments

If for any reason, a customer is entitled to a refund, the amount overpaid shall be credited to the customer's account. Should the customer need to pay additional charges, such charges may be spread over 3 months installment.

³ Refers to range of results from the consultation with the Board during the coaching/mentoring on customer service conducted on Oct.1, 2007.

4.5 Complaints and Disputes Handling by the Commission

4.5.1 Customer complaints and disputes involving the operation of the Board, including matters relating to applicability of tariff, billings, service disconnections, and service standards, may be brought to the Commission for resolution.

4.5.2 The Commission's authority to handle disputes are vested under the following provisions of the Amendments to the NWSDB Act dated_____:

“86. (1) Notwithstanding any provision of this Law or any other Act, a customer may refer any unresolved customer complaint or dispute to the Commission for investigation, mediation and resolution. The Commission shall mediate and resolve such complaint or dispute unless the Commission decides that it is more appropriate for the same to be determined by Court or by Arbitration.

(2) The practice and procedure to be followed in the resolution of any such complaints or disputes shall be such as the Commission shall set out by rules made under the PUCSL Act.

(3) A resolution of the Commission under this section-

(a) may include an order, award or direction as the Commission considers appropriate including such incidental, supplemental and consequential provisions requiring either party to pay a sum in respect of the costs or expenses incurred by the Commission;

(b) shall, subject to subsection (4), be final and enforceable in the District Court of Colombo as if it were a Decree entered by that Court;

(4) An appeal shall lie by any party aggrieved by an order, award or direction made under subsection (3) (a) above on a question of law to the Court of Appeal.

(5) The provisions of subsections (3), (4) and (5) of section 19 of the PUCSL Act shall mutatis mutandis apply in relation to the preferring and determination of such an Appeal.

(6) A copy of any order and direction or other document made by or in the custody of the Commission and certified by the Chairman to be a true copy thereof shall, in any court, be evidence of the order and direction or other document without proof of the signature of the Commission.

(7) Any person who without lawful authority contravenes or fails to comply with an order, award or direction of the Commission shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable on conviction after summary trial before a Magistrate to a fine not exceeding one million rupees and where the offence is a continuing offence to an additional fine of five hundred thousand rupees for each day during which such contravention continues.”

4.5.3 The Commission, however, will act only on complaints and disputes which remain unacted by the Board after 30 days from the date of filing by the customer or which remained unresolved because the customer is not satisfied with the action or decision of the Board;

4.5.4 For complaints involving disputed billings, the Board and the customer shall attempt to settle the dispute by agreeing on the amount in accordance with Section 87 (5) (a) of the NWSDB Act. If no agreement is reached within 30 days from filing of the complaint with the Board, the complaint or dispute may be brought by the customer to the Commission for resolution. The Commission shall not act on any customer complaint for disputed billing unless

the customer submits proof to the Commission showing that payment of the disputed billing under protest has been made to the Board.

- 4.5.5 The Commission shall act on complaints and disputes within seven (7) days from filing of the complaint. The Commission shall have the option to resolve the complaint or dispute by mediation or investigation or refer the complaint to the Minister, the relevant court, or for arbitration if deemed more appropriate under the circumstances.
- 4.5.6 In any case or complaint brought to the Commission for resolution, the Commission may conduct an independent investigation to determine the factual circumstances. Within thirty (30) days from the time the complaint was filed, the Commission shall issue a resolution in writing with its factual findings and reasons to support its resolution. It may include an award or direction to pay such amount as deemed appropriate, including payment of rebates to the customer and such costs or expenses incurred by the other party and the Commission and shall be final and enforceable in the District Court of Colombo.
- 4.5.7 The resolution, order, award or direction of the Commission may be appealed by an aggrieved party to the Court of Appeal on question of law with the period prescribed by such court
- 4.5.8 The practice and procedure before the Commission shall be in accordance with such rules issued by the Commission under the PUCSL Act.
- 4.5.9 To ensure that the Board take immediate action on service requests and complaints by the customers, and attain overall satisfactory customer relations, the Commission may adopt a policy to compensate customers whenever the Board fails to comply with the standard response time for specific consumer complaint.
- 4.5.10 The specific instances where the consumers shall be compensated from the failure of the Board to comply with the standard response time shall be identified, adopted and communicated to the customers.

5

Customers' Responsibilities

5.1 General Obligations and Role of Customers

- (i) It is recognized that the customers' role is equally important in ensuring an efficient and sustainable water supply and sewerage system. Without the customers understanding and support for the utility, the Board will have difficulty meeting its service obligations and ensuring a sustainable operation.
- (ii) It is envisaged that the Customer Care Unit in the Board shall play a vital role in enhancing customer satisfaction and mobilizing their support to the Board's operations. The unit shall implement programs that promote good customer relations and encourage support from the customers.

5.1.1 Consumer Consultative Council

- (i) In accordance with the Amendments to the NWSDB Act, dated _____, the Board shall have in place and regularly consult a Consumer Consultative Council (CCC) that will enable customer involvement in water services matters that affect the customers.
- (ii) The Council shall represent the customers' views and suggestions on the Board's operations; and shall be the official body with whom the Board shall consult or inform on matters that directly affect the customers. The Council is expected to provide advice to promote the interests of customers and other key issues relating to the provision of water supply and sewerage services.
- (iii) Membership, tenure and functions/responsibilities of the CCC shall be decided jointly by the Ministry, the Board and the Commission.
- (iv) Within three (3) months of establishing the CCC, the Board, Ministry and the Commission shall develop a charter or by-laws that will address the following:
 - Role and functions of the Council
 - Membership and selection criteria on how members will be appointed to the Council
 - System on how the Council will operate
 - Description of issues and concerns that will be referred to the Council
- (v) The Board shall provide the Council access to required information that will guide the Council in making an informed decision on concerns and problems that are referred to them.

5.1.1 Support for Water Conservation

- (i) The Board shall ensure customers support for water conservation by encouraging the following roles of customers:
 - Reporting of illegal connections or meter tampering in the area.
 - Reporting of pipe leaks and their exact locations.
 - Repair or replacement of defective plumbing pipes and fixtures which are sources of wastage of water within their premises.

Providing suggestions for water source development, reduction of water wastage and minimizing pollution.

Active participation in conflict resolution involving water sharing.

- (ii) The Board shall at all times solicit the assistance of people from mass media (both print and broadcast) in their water conservation program.

5.1.2 Support for Sustainability of the Board's Operations

- (i) Customers shall be encouraged to do the following:

To pay their water bills on time – Customers are enjoined to pay on or before due date specified in the water bill or statement of account. A 2% rebate is given to customers who pay their bills on or before the due date. Paying on time ensures easier management of finances and meeting expenditures on time. For advance payment of monthly bills, a 4% rebate is given per month of advance payment.

To pay the appropriate tariff – When customers support reasonable tariff adjustments, it allows the Board to recover the necessary costs to deliver the expected levels of service as well as to sustain its operations.

To comply with all the conditions imposed or stipulated in the service contract.

To provide support at the planning for rehabilitation or expansion of current facilities by providing suggestions or accurate data (during surveys) and share capital or other component when requested by the Board in such instances.

To take appropriate action on any information reaching them regarding malpractices, wastage of resources and even sabotage.

- (ii) Disconnection of Water Services of Delinquent Customers – Water service for all delinquent customers shall be temporarily disconnected. If and when the water bill is not paid within the due date plus the allowable grace period, the said water connection shall be subject for disconnection the following day. If the bill is paid with a check with insufficient funds, the bill shall remain unpaid and shall be considered delinquent and water service is subject to disconnection if said check is not sufficiently funded until the due date.
- (iii) Reconnections – Customers shall be allowed to have their water service reconnected provided all the terms and conditions for reconnections are complied with, especially those which led to the disconnection of water services in the first place.

- 5.1.3 Feedback – The customer would always be the best person to assess the level of performance of the Board, being the direct recipient of the Board's service. Customer feedback will be used to guide the Board in assessing which areas of the Board's operation is performing well and which areas need improvement.

- 5.1.4 Customers' feedback through the telephones, any electronic means or personal visits shall be documented, analyzed and acted upon. The conduct of customer satisfaction surveys shall be done from time to time. The customers will be informed on the results of these customer satisfaction surveys.

Glossary and Acronyms

- (a) **Assets** - mean the structures, plant , equipment, and other properties which enable, allow, or assist in the delivery of services
- (b) **Board** - National Water Supply and Drainage Board (NWSDB), provider of water and wastewater services
- (c) **CEA** –Central Environmental Authority
- (d) **Commission** – Public Utilities Commission of Sri Lanka, which is the proposed regulator of the NWSDB
- (e) **Complaint** – a manifested dissatisfaction by the customer on the service delivered by the Board
- (f) **Consumer** – any person who consumes or uses the services provided by the Board
- (g) **Customer** – mean any person who has entered into a contract with the Board for the provision of water and/or sewerage service
- (h) **CCC** – Consumer Consultative Council
- (i) **CSA** – Customer Service Agreement
- (j) **CSG** – Customer Service Guidelines
- (k) **Drinking water** – means water intended primarily for human consumption but which has other personal, domestic or household uses such bathing, washing clothes, cooking, etc.
- (l) **KPI** - Key Performance Indicator
- (m) **KRA** – Key Result Area
- (n) **Marine Pollution Control Authority**
- (o) **Minister** – Minister in charge of water supply, drainage and sewerage services
- (p) **NRW** – non-revenue water
- (q) **NWSDB** – National Water Supply and Drainage Board
- (r) **Planned Water Interruption** – is an event which commences when the supply of drinking water is interrupted following the receipt by the customer of prior water interruption notice and stops when a normal supply of drinking water is restored
- (s) **PUCSL** – Public Utilities Commission of Sri Lanka
- (t) **Regulatory Period** – period covered by each review of the Regulator (5 Years) which coincides with the business planning for tariff adjustment purposes
- (u) **RSC** – Regional Support Center
- (v) **Services** - means the services provided by the Board which includes water supply and sewerage services
- (w) **SLS** - Sri Lanka Standards
- (x) **SRC** – Service Request and Complaint
- (y) **Uncontrolled sewage overflow** - sewage overflow which is not controlled
- (z) **Unplanned water interruption** - is an event which commences when the supply of drinking water is interrupted without the customer receiving a prior water interruption notice and is caused mostly by reasons other than the failure of the Board.