

CPUC reins in PG&E's advertising blitz in Marin

Heather Ishimaru, KGO Thursday, April 08, 2010

MARIN, CA (KGO) -- In Marin County PG&E is being told to back off. The California Public Utilities Commission is reigning in the utility's efforts to contact its customers there.

PG&E will be facing something new in Marin next month -- competition, from the newly formed Marin Energy Authority. The authority is a Community Choice Aggregation, or CCA, and the law requires that PG&E cooperate with them. Thursday Marin residents told the PUC that PG&E is not cooperating, sending inflammatory mailers and pressuring customers with phone calls.

"They're phone-banking, they've got call centers in Iowa and Palm Springs calling saying, 'Do you know that your electricity is about to be switched, with no warning?'" says Marin resident Megan Matson.

The PUC adopted a resolution clarifying rules about how PG&E can contact customers and saying PG&E cannot offer incentives to local governments in return for not forming a CCA.

"My view is that the utilities should comply, with not only the letter of the law, but the spirit of the law. The law requires cooperation with CCAs and I do hope the utilities, PG&E in particular, will look closely at its practices," says PUC commissioner Nancy Ryan.

Commissioner John Bohn said PG&E has done nothing wrong.

"In terms of our rules, they were permitted to make fair comments in advocating their position," says CPUC commissioner John Bohn.

"The resolution today affirms our ability to communicate with our customers about their energy supplier options," says PG&E spokesperson Katie Romans.

There is another CCA in the San Joaquin Valley and San Francisco is working on one, but PG&E is behind a measure on the June ballot that would make it much harder to form CCAs going forward, by requiring a two-thirds vote.

"We want our customers to have a voice in their community's decision to use public funds to get into the energy business," says Romans.

"The Sierra Club is outraged and opposed to PG&E's Prop 16 on the June 8 ballot, we feel it is an outrageous manipulation of voters," says Sierra Club San Francisco member Aaron Israel.

The Marin Energy Authority begins service on May 7.

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