

Residential Customer Group (RCG)

On Behalf of Members: Lowell & Donna Kitzmann

I am Lori Ebaugh, a representative of the Residential Customer Group (RCG), a non-profit corporation advocating for Michigan's residential electric and gas utility customers. I am here today to share the threatened shut-off experience of two of our members, Lowell and Donna Kitzmann who couldn't attend because they are out of state. They were threatened with a DTE shut off in November 2017.

The Kitzmanns were originally contacted by DTE in November of 2015 about changing their meter from analog to AMI. The Kitzmanns promptly communicated back to DTE with their concerns about an AMI meter but received no response for two years until they were threatened with a shut off last fall. Then our members were not even given 10 business days to respond.

DTE's letter dated November 11, 2017 informed them that they would be shut off on or after December 4, 2017 if they didn't contact DTE to schedule a meter exchange. Our members immediately wrote and called DTE at the number given in the letter and reached the "Revenue Management & Protection Department". They were put on hold for 26 minutes. Then they were told to call another department, but only reached a voice mail. After over an hour of run around they left a message requesting a utility customer hearing and said they would call the Michigan Agency for Energy (MAE) to speak with a Regulation Officer. Finally, they spoke with an actual DTE representative and were told that an e-mail would be sent to yet another DTE department and their shut off date would be delayed.

When they called the MAE they were put on hold for a 6 minutes, then told that DTE had no record of a shut off for any customer with their name! Drew at MAE relayed that DTE would respond to their MAE inquiry within 10 days. On 12.14.2017 our members called the MAE again because they had not received anything in writing from either DTE or MAE.

From the Kitzmann's in their own words:

"As we have relayed to DTE in regard to their threat of shut off, we are currently out of state and we are in our 80's. This is an investment property for us and in addition we have a contract with the tenant who has special needs which adds to the seriousness of this matter. The winter season in Michigan also brings with it the very real threat of frozen pipes if the electricity (heat) is turned off. We find this predicament most troubling and upsetting. Why DTE has ignored us for the past two years and then waits until Dec./winter to threaten us with disconnecting the power adds to this stress too."

Recently Ray Harris, DTE Energy Field Operations Mgr., told "Detroit Wants2Know" that "there are 7,500 customers still remaining (with analog meters), with locked gates, dogs or don't want AMI". RCG knows from our MPSC electric rate case filings that there are ~20,000 households who have opted-out of AMI meters. These customers could have the same concerns as the Kitzmanns and the others testifying here today.

The MPSC Rules are very confusing for most people to understand. The letter the Kitzmanns received on 11.22.2017 said nothing of their rights to file a complaint or to request a utility customer hearing. Either of these options would halt the shut off process until the matter is resolved.