

Dear Members of the Ontario Energy Board;

RE: EB-2008-0413

Please find below our comments as representatives of a coalition formed because of unfair business practices by Natural Resource Gas (NRG) in the Town of Aylmer and surrounding area. We ask that you take a moment to read this document as it is near to our hearts.

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We have also a complete customer service department that is there to satisfy the needs of both the utility side of the business and the appliance side of the business for installation and so forth.

COMPLETE?? They don't have a customer complaint policy, and nobody to handle the complaints.

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MR. TUNLEY: How long have you been in the gas business?  
MR. BRISTOLL: Since 2005.

It is only since 2005 there have been issues with security deposits.....etc.

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MR. BRISTOLL: The final decision. It seems a bit unfair to implement the proposed ones, and then find out six months later that we are going to re-implement something else. I think it would just create customer confusion.

Why would it be a problem to do so now....NRG has changed it's deposit policy three times at least in the last two years and up until February 2009 has never sent a mass mail out with bills to inform customers of these changes. Therefore, as far as customer's know...the deposit policy is the same as what it was when their deposit was given.

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If we cannot solve the relationship issues, then all of the municipalities should have all of their options available.

Is that not the right of a municipality to be able to change suppliers if they so desire...I mean if it isn't then what is the point of doing all the paper pushing and legal stuff in having franchise agreements for certain lengths of time. You might as well just have an agreement that is forever if you can at no time exercise the right to change suppliers.

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but we ran into a few circumstances with tobacco farmers, in particular, who had quite large bills who did not pay those bills for significant periods of time, and those bills ran up to really large sums of money.

If NRG is worried about tobacco farmers....there aren't too many tobacco farmers left anymore in this area, so why is it still an excuse, furthermore why are the little guys...us individual consumers being penalized for what the larger ones are doing? Isn't it enough to pay your bill on time? That should solely be what their deposit requirements are based upon.

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MR. BRISTOLL: So the issue for us is whether we're filing for a -- whether we will have to recover our assets over a three-year period, because there will be no renewal, or whether we will do it in the normal course of business, which significantly impacts how we would go about this.

In the 2006 rate case, there was less than 3 years left on the franchise agreement, there was no definite indication from the Town that they would renew and NRG was able to go through the rate case...what's the big deal now? Should they not have presented then that they would have to recover their assets in a three year period....there is never a certainty that there will be a renewal, unless it is in writing.

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What we did is we looked at the individuals that came to us and had requested service, and we did a credit check on them and we based it upon what we thought were reasonable standards for credit checks. And it was evaluated that we would need to get a security deposit.

If they have a good payment history in the next 12 months, then our policy is to return 50 percent of it, which we do.

They look at credit history to see who is required to give one, but payment history to see who gets it back???? Should it not be one in the same? Either you make payment history the basis for all decisions in regards to security deposits or you make credit history the basis...it hardly seems fair to do one and then the other. And it shouldn't matter who else you owe money to, it should only matter to NRG if you have paid them in the past especially if you have a past history with the company.

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MR. BRISTOLL: And I recognize that concern, and I think we have gone a long way in the last while to work with the town and to work with our customers to come up with a much kinder, gentler, softer policy.

Their policy has not gotten softer...it has gotten harder, they went from giving a full deposit back after one year to only 50% the first and 50% the second...how is that softer?

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MR. BRISTOLL: Do we have a complaint line where you can dial in to a single person?

MR. TUNLEY: You don't, do you?

MR. BRISTOLL: No, we don't. That would be logistically very difficult for our company.

MR. TUNLEY: And you have no call-answering performance system to measure -- to record the information that comes in at any of those numbers and measure the response time of staff to those calls, do you? You don't have that system in place.

How do they know how many complaints they are getting if there is no system. So for them to say they haven't had a complaint since November 2008 is irresponsible. There is no way for a customer to complain to them.

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MR. TUNLEY: And there is no form that your staff is required to fill out indicating who called, when, what they were complaining of, and what actions were taken, is there?

MR. BRISTOLL: No. We have received very few complaints.

That is because when one calls to complain, no one will take the

complaint down, if you leave a message, no one will return your call. On that note; Dear NRG, is it not most frustrating to leave messages and have no one return your calls (as alleged by NRG that The Town of Aylmer did). We, know all about that from NRG.

MR. TUNLEY: And -- well, how do you know?

MR. BRISTOLL: Because we follow up on every one we receive.

Absolutely a false statement, most of the folks in town and surrounding areas had to revert to their MPP, or the Town of Aylmer, or the Aylmer Police, and the OEB, and/or the BBB, as well as a petition, other Ministers.....!  
And now you have something in place to follow up on complaints, after more than 2 years of frustrations for your consumers?

MR. TUNLEY: How?

MR. BRISTOLL: Because either -- with a company our size, the general manager would be involved in it, and we would address it at the time.

MR. TUNLEY: So you send it straight to the general manager and the president, if there's a call about complaints?

MR. BRISTOLL: No. If it's a localized call with somebody who is enquiring about something, it would go to the divisional department manager. But if it was to escalate, it would normally involve the general manager.

Anytime I called, I was told the Manager was not available even after I specifically asked for one. When I asked when he would be in, I was told they never know when he comes in, because he is only in occasionally. Also, no one at NRG would provide names of managers, supervisors, president or even whom you were talking to at the time. They were all nameless....

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MR. BRISTOLL: We have started the process whereby we do have a log now that records all written complaints, and it actually records the nature of the complaint and the resolution of that complaint.

I thought they just said they have no written form for the staff to fill out?  
Well NRG is consistent, they say one thing and do another....and another! 3 written security deposit policy in less than 2 years! And let's not forget the original verbal policy that "your

deposit will be returned after 1 year". So, effectively there has been 4 policies in less than 2 years.

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MR. BRISTOLL: Our concern with implementing them was -- is to create -- is the desire not to create confusion with respect to implementing one thing, and then several months later having a process brought out and doing another.

They have implemented at least three new policies in the last two years...so what difference does one more make. They have never sent out notices of those changes up until February 2009 with customer's bills. Not to mention that the first time we were asked for our security deposit in late 2005 and 2006, we WERE ALL TOLD; REFUNDED AFTER 12 MONTHS (no other conditions were mentioned). Of course hundreds of us are wrong according to NRG. And the deposit itself was much too high, not at all in keeping with the electricity guidelines for security deposits. Nor, would NRG accept letters from other utilities in lieu of a deposit, which again is not in keeping with the electricity guidelines. They did not follow the Gas access rules in the past, how do we assure they will in the future.

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MR. TUNLEY: Well, that is exactly the rationale for a three-year term. If all of this is a paper exercise and it doesn't result in real change, we need to know that before 20 years from now, because 20 years from now is too late.

Awesome point!!!

In closing, we strongly feel that if we had not pushed this issue to the forefront, we would still be waiting for NRG to deal with the security deposits and other issues. So we wholeheartedly support The Town of Aylmer in their request for a 3 year term so that NRG can put in place a proper way of dealing with its customer base. Any other business/company (in the competitive world, not in a monopoly world) has to earn their customer's business by dealing with them in a courteous and fair manner if they wish to retain their business but I am afraid that even that very basic skill is sadly lacking at NRG since 2005. And I can say this as I have been a customer of NRG since 1991, and since 2005 we have noticed a marked change for the worst.

Many other instances that were not followed up on our part also could be discussed here, lack of due diligence when NRG service people come to investigate a potential gas leak, huge turnover of employees resulting in poorly informed personnel when requesting a quote for a new furnace or other appliances. Strong arm practices to pressure people into purchasing from them, as well as many others.

The failure to mention the availability of a rebate when purchasing a new gas furnace (which we found when digging into the OEB files and whether the furnace was purchased from NRG or another company) as promised by NRG to the OEB.

All in all, we do not want a repeat of this "holding people hostage" in their own community and in this day and age, it should not be allowed to happen.

So, we appeal to the Ontario Energy Board to give us some form of control, so that if, in the future NRG should continue these despicable practices, we have some form of process to deal with them in an equitable and fair fashion just as we want to be treated.

We chose to fight back, but not everyone is able to do so, and that segment of the local population has to be protected; and I will invoke the OEB's own objectives here;

- To facilitate competition in the sale of gas to users;
- **To protect the interests of consumers with respect to prices and the reliability and quality of gas service;**
- To facilitate rational expansion of transmission and distribution systems;
- To facilitate rational development and safe operation of gas storage;
- To facilitate opportunities for energy efficiency consistent with the policies of the Ontario government;
- and
- To promote communication within the gas industry and the education of consumers.

Thank you and warmest regards,  
The coalition for fair business practices by NRG