RIC Launches 800-4RIC & Notification Plan


Event Notification and Response Management Plan

The Event Notification and Response Management Plan provides guidance to the Service Providers, which fall under the purview of the RIC, on how and when they must notify RIC in the event of any incident that may adversely affect consumers. The Plan also outlines procedures for both the Service Provider and RIC to follow in the occurrence of an event and seeks to ensure that consumers are also informed on a timely basis.

The Notification Process has three stages. These are as follows:

1. Initial notification to the RIC by the Service Provider;
2. Certification of the Event by RIC; and
3. Notification to affected customers by the Service Provider.

A failure in the electricity sector would require T&T to notify RIC by telephone within two hours of the occurrence. An incident in the water sector would require WASA to notify RIC within four hours of the occurrence. Service Providers in the RIC Act, which fall under the purview of the RIC, must submit a written interim report within three working days and a final report within 10 working days of any incident.

Toll Free Number 800-4RIC

The 800-4RIC provides consumers with a direct contact link to the Commission’s Customer Services Department at no cost.

RIC’s Customer Service Department responds to consumer complaints about the public utilities.

The Toll Free Number reinforces RIC’s commitment to providing easy access, and through a cost effective service, to the consumers of Trinidad and Tobago.

Both the Event Notification and Response Management Plan and the 800-Toll-Free Number – 800-4RIC demonstrate the Commission’s commitment to a rapid response action to emergencies as well as its commitment to the timely dissemination of information.

What's Inside

- Event Notification and Response Management Plan and the 800 Toll Free Number
- The Trinidad and Tobago Electricity’s Commission Performance
- Quality of Service Standards for Water and Wastewater Sector
- Social Action Plan
- Upcoming Activities

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RIC GRADES T&TEC PERFORMANCE UNDER THE QUALITY OF SERVICE STANDARDS

T&TEC First Quarterly Report on Meeting the Guaranteed and Overall Standards for the Electricity Sector – April-June 2004

The Quality of Service Standards for the Electricity Transmission and Distribution Sector became law in Trinidad and Tobago on April 7, 2004. This enactment now requires that the Electricity Commission adhere to the prescribed Quality of Service Standards for the sector.

The Regulated Industries Commission is mandated to monitor the performance of T&TEC and its adherence to the established Quarterly of Service Standards (QSS).

T&TEC’s first Quarterly Report on its Performance under the Quality of Service Standards for the Electricity Sector demonstrated that the Commission would need to put additional resources in place to achieve all the Guaranteed Standards.

Particularly, T&TEC did not achieve the following Guaranteed Standards:
- GES 1 – Restoration of Electricity
- GES 2 – Billing Punctuality
- GES 6 – Connection to Supply

The Electricity Commission has indicated that breaches in Guaranteed Standards One and Two were as a result of industrial unrest in the organisation.

The breach in GES 6 demonstrated a time constraint problem within T&TEC as they were unable to provide estimates within the required performance period.

The RIC will monitor these areas to ensure full compliance.

Among the Overall Standards, T&TEC experienced some difficulty in meeting the Standards for Systems Losses, Response to Customer Queries and Handling of Voltage Complaints. The RIC will monitor these Standards for improvements over the next quarter.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

THE COMPLAINTS PROCESS

Put it in writing!

If you believe your complaint to a utility has not been handled effectively, follow the process below and let the RIC act on your behalf.

1. Follow the complaints procedures of T&TEC and WASA.
2. If you are not satisfied with the decision or how the complaint was handled, you may then contact the Regulated Industries Commission (RIC).
3. Submit your complaint either by:
   - Post
   - Telephone
   - Fax
   - Email
   - A visit to the RIC office
4. Supply all relevant information and/or documents that would assist the Commission in understanding and investigating your complaint.
5. RIC will contact the service provider and keep you informed of the status of your complaint.
6. RIC will respond within 10 working days of receiving your complaint.

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

- RIC’s Final Determination on Quality of Service Standards for the Water and Wastewater Sector.
- RIC’s National Consultation on the Social Action Plan
- The publication of RIC’s Consultation Document, "Developing a Public Consultation Code"
RIC WORKING TO ESTABLISH
QUALITY OF SERVICE STANDARDS

Public Comments Contribute to the Establishment of Quality of Service Standards

The RIC is mandated to establish service standards for Service Providers which fall under its purview. The Commission has developed 19 Draft Quality of Service Standards (QSS) for the Water and Wastewater Sector which form part of a new regime for regulating the providers of water and wastewater services.

There are generally two types of Standards-Guaranteed Standards which the utility must achieve and carries penalties for failure; and Overall Standards which establish a minimum level of service quality the utility will be expected to deliver.

The ten Guaranteed Standards include the following:
- A scheduled supply of water not less than twice per week for a minimum of 12 hours.
- Supply must be restored within 72 hours after cuts or lock-offs.
- Truck-borne water must be provided within four hours if a pipe-borne interruption lasts more than the prescribed time.
- Broken supply pipes must be repaired within 24 hours if the leak is heavy or can cause damage, and 72 hours if the leakage is affecting supply to customers.
- Within seven days of paying for a new service, customers must be connected.
- The Utility must reply to billing queries and written complaints within five working days, and after investigation, deliver a final response within 40 days.
- Compensation payments must be credited to customers' accounts within 90 days of claim.
- Compensation payment for persons who have received poor quality drinking water as determined by RIC.

Failure of WASA to meet any of the Guaranteed Standards will result in a payment of compensation to domestic customers in the form of a rebate of up to 15 per cent of their quarterly water bill.

The nine Overall Standards, for the Water and Wastewater Sector include the following:
- WASA must inform customers through the media of any water lock-offs at least 48 hours beforehand.
- Minimum and maximum water pressure levels must be maintained.
- Meters must be read (not estimated) twice yearly for households and at least every three months for businesses; and, if necessary, within 30 days.
- Drinking water and wastewater treatment must meet both World Health Organisation and Trinidad and Tobago quality requirements.
- If a road surface is excavated to repair a leak, WASA must ensure temporary repairs are completed within 24 hours and permanent repairs within seven days.
- WASA must draw up Codes of Practice, approved by the RIC to:
  (a) Ensure reduction and control of leaks which affect service to customers;
  (b) Ensure customers are disconnected for non-payment only after due process; and
  (c) Minimize disruption to the public caused by the laying of mains.

NATIONAL CONSULTATION

The RIC Act mandates the Commission to consult with all stakeholders in the conduct of its duties. This has resulted in the development and implementation of a Public Consultation programme which provides the public with an opportunity to be involved in the regulatory decision making process.

The Commission has conducted 24 Consultations in communities across Trinidad and Tobago and held a National Consultation on the Draft QSS for the Water and Wastewater Sector. Over 300 persons participated in the Consultation. The comments received from the consultations will form the basis for RIC's deliberations and final decision on the QSS for the Water and Wastewater Sector.
RIC’s SOCIAL ACTION PLAN

The RIC, in its role of Regulator, can protect consumer interest and ensure value for money by:
1. Establishing of affordable and efficient tariffs;
2. Establishing of Quality of Service Standards;
3. Establishing effective complaints procedure; and
4. Implementing RIC’s public consultation processes, which results in consumer education and empowerment.

The Commission will also provide consumer protection through its Social Action Plan which lays the foundation for comprehensive and on-going initiatives by the Commission.

The Plan focuses on programmes, which target low-income and vulnerable groups and identifies where the Commission will concentrate priority action and expected contributions from Service Providers.

The Social Action Plan explores three priority areas. They are:
- Initiatives to improve benefits from Price Regulation;
- Development of Codes of Practice; and
- Provision of Priority Services to Vulnerable Groups.

Initiatives to Improve Benefits from Price Regulation
These include the development of innovative tariffs and subsidy schemes to assist customers, and favour lower-income and vulnerable groups.

RIC recommends that Service Providers implement improvements in the following six areas which will result in an improvement in customer service delivery:
- Procedures for dealing with customers in default
- Debt recovery and disconnection procedures and policies;
- Retroactive Billing Policies;
- A Range of Accessibility of Payment Methods;
- The Handling of Complaints; and
- Continuous Consumer Education.

Provision of Priority Services to Vulnerable Groups
This will allow for the provision of special consideration and services for vulnerable groups.

CUSTOMER SERVICES REVIEW

A six-month review of the RIC’s customer complaints revealed that the RIC received 685 complaints from Jan–Jun 2004, this represents an increase of 166 or 31% when compared to the same period last year.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status of complaints received (2004)</th>
<th>The percentage of complaints received by Service Provider (Jan-Jun 2004)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unresolved: 29%</td>
<td>WASA: 36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferred to Trinidad and Tobago</td>
<td>T&amp;T: 35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telecommunications Authority (TTTA)</td>
<td>TATT: 27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolved: 61%</td>
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</tbody>
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PROCLAMATION OF THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS AUTHORITY ACT

With the proclamation of the Telecommunications Act 2001 as amended by the Telecommunications Amendment Act 2004, the regulation of the Telecommunications Sector which includes telephone, radio broadcasting, cable, and cellular services has been transferred from the Regulated Industries Commission (RIC), to the Trinidad and Tobago Telecommunications Authority (TTTA) which falls under the purview of the Ministry of Public Administration and Information.

JUDICIAL REVIEW AND THE INTERNATIONAL CALLING CENTRES

Owners of International Calling Centres sought judicial review of RIC’s decision which barred them from operating a Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) telephone service without a license.

TTRA reiterated RIC’s decision taken in April, 2004 and has instructed all International Calling Centre Operators and Internet Service Providers currently engaged in the provision of international public telecommunications services without a license, to register and apply for a license to provide such services.

This is consistent with Sections 85(4A) and 85(4B) of the Telecommunications Act 2001 as amended by Section 21 of the Telecommunications Amendment Act 2004 which states:
- Section 21 (1) “No person shall operate a public telecommunications network, provide a public telecommunications service or broadcasting service, without a concession granted by the Minister.”
- Section 21 (2) “A person who wishes to operate a network or provide a service described in subsection (1), shall apply to the Authority in the manner prescribed.”