

**BEFORE THE  
PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION**

Mary Mitchell	:	
	:	
v.	:	F-2016-2575154
	:	
Philadelphia Gas Works	:	

**INITIAL DECISION**

Before  
Marta Guhl  
Administrative Law Judge

**INTRODUCTION**

This initial decision grants the Respondent’s Motion to Dismiss the Complainant’s Complaint for lack of prosecution because the Complainant failed to appear at the scheduled hearing in this matter.

**HISTORY OF THE PROCEEDING**

On November 9, 2016, Mary Mitchell (Complainant) filed a formal Complaint (Complaint) against Philadelphia Gas Works (PGW or Respondent) alleging that the company had shut off her service, indicating that there were safety and reliability issues with her service and requesting a payment arrangement.

On November 30, 2016, PGW filed its Answer, admitting that it had terminated service but denying the other material allegations of the Complaint.

This Complaint is the timely appeal of an informal complaint at the Bureau of Consumer Services (BCS) Case No. 3481626 in which the BCS dismissed the complaint indicating that the Company had followed proper termination procedures and that the Complainant was not eligible for the payment arrangement under 66 Pa.C.S. § 1407(d).

By Hearing Notice dated January 26, 2017, a hearing was scheduled for Wednesday, March 1, 2017 at 10:00 a.m., as part of a call of the docket, and the matter was assigned to me. The Hearing Notice advised the parties of the location, date and time of the scheduled hearing and warned in italicized and underlined type: “Attention: *You may lose the case if you do not come to this hearing and present facts on the issues raised.*”

A Prehearing Order was issued on January 27, 2017. The Prehearing Order directed the parties to comply with various procedural requirements and directed that a request to change the scheduled hearing should be sent to me at least five days prior to the hearing date, be in writing and state the agreement or opposition of the other party. It warned both parties of potentially serious consequences if they failed to obtain a continuance and failed to participate in the hearing, including the dismissal of the complaint. It also explained that the Complainant bears the burden of proof to establish that the Respondent violated its tariff, the Public Utility Code, or a Commission Order or regulation, and that she is entitled to the relief requested in the Complaint.

The hearing convened as scheduled on March 1, 2017. Counsel for PGW was present with one potential witness and was prepared to proceed. Ms. Mitchell was not present, and had not contacted this office to indicate whether she would or would not participate.

No witnesses were presented and no exhibits were introduced into the record. Respondent’s counsel moved that the Complaint be dismissed with prejudice for lack of prosecution (Motion) pursuant to 52 Pa.Code § 5.245. In accordance with Commission policy, I am granting the Motion.

The record was closed on March 1, 2017.

## FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The Complainant in this case is Mary Mitchell whose mailing address is 2119 Bellevue Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19140.

2. The Respondent in this proceeding is Philadelphia Gas Works.

3. By Hearing Notice dated January 26, 2017, a hearing was scheduled for Wednesday, March 1, 2017 at 10:00 a.m., with both parties given notice.

4. Both parties were advised of the procedures for requesting a continuance of a scheduled hearing, as well as, the date, time, and location by Prehearing Order dated January 27, 2017.

5. The Complainant was advised that the Complaint would be dismissed if she failed to participate in the scheduled hearing by the January 26, 2017, Hearing Notice and the January 27, 2017, Prehearing Order.

6. Respondent participated in the hearing at the scheduled date and time by legal counsel and a proposed witness and was prepared to proceed.

7. Complainant failed to participate in the scheduled hearing.

8. Complainant did not settle or withdraw the Complaint nor obtain a continuance prior to the scheduled hearing.

9. The Hearing Notice, which contained the date, location, and time of the scheduled hearing, was not returned by the postal authorities as undeliverable.

## DISCUSSION

The Public Utility Code, 66 Pa.C.S. § 332(a), places the burden of proof upon the proponent of a rule or order. As the proponent of a rule or order, Complainant has the burden of proof in this matter pursuant to 66 Pa.C.S. § 332(a).

To establish a sufficient case and satisfy the burden of proof, Complainant must show that the Respondent public utility is responsible or accountable for the problem described in the Complaint. *Patterson v. Bell Telephone Co. of Pa.*, 72 Pa. PUC 196 (1990), *Feinstein v. Philadelphia Suburban Water Co.*, 50 Pa. PUC 300 (1976). Such a showing must be by a preponderance of the evidence. *Samuel J. Lansberry, Inc. v. Pa. Pub. Util. Comm'n*, 578 A.2d 600, 602 (Pa.Cmwlt. 1990), *alloc. den.*, 602 A.2d 863 (Pa. 1992). That is, by presenting evidence more convincing, by even the smallest amount, than that presented by the other party. *Se-Ling Hosiery v. Margulies*, 364 Pa. 45, 70 A.2d 854 (1950). Additionally, any finding of fact necessary to support the Commission's adjudication must be based upon substantial evidence. *Mill v. Pa. Pub. Util. Comm'n*, 447 A.2d 1100 (Pa.Cmwlt. 1982); *Edan Transportation Corp. v. Pa. Pub. Util. Comm'n*, 623 A.2d 6 (Pa.Cmwlt. 1993); 2 Pa.C.S. § 704. More is required than a mere trace of evidence or a suspicion of the existence of a fact sought to be established. *Norfolk and Western Ry. v. Pa. Pub. Util. Comm'n*, 489 Pa. 109, 413 A.2d 1037 (1980); *Erie Resistor Corp. v. Unemployment Compensation Bd. of Review*, 194 Pa. Super. 278, 166 A.2d 96 (1960); *Murphy v. Commonwealth, Dep't of Public Welfare, White Haven Center*, 480 A.2d 382 (Pa.Cmwlt. 1984).

Administrative agencies, such as the Commission, are required to provide due process to the parties appearing before them. *Schneider v. Pa. Pub. Util. Comm'n*, 479 A.2d 10 (Pa.Cmwlt. 1984). However, this due process requirement is satisfied when the parties are provided notice and the opportunity to appear and be heard. *Id.*

Notice of the March 1, 2017 hearing in this case was sent to the Complainant on January 26, 2017, by regular first-class mail to the address stated on the Complaint. This piece of mail was never returned to the sender, the scheduling staff for the Office of Administrative Law

Judge (OALJ) in Harrisburg.<sup>1</sup> Notice mailed to a party's last known address and not returned by the post office is presumed to have been received. *Meierdierck v. Miller*, 394 Pa. 484, 147 A.2d 406 (1959); *Berkowitz v. Mayflower Securities, Inc.*, 455 Pa. 531, 317 A.2d 584 (1974). Therefore, the Complainant is deemed to have received this document and had sufficient notice of the location, date and time of the scheduled hearing.

The Complainant was notified of the scheduled hearing date and time, and location for the hearing. Despite this, she made no attempt whatsoever to notify me that she did not plan to participate in the hearing. Under these circumstances, it appears Complainant had ample opportunity to be heard in this proceeding, but voluntarily chose not to do so. Therefore, the due process rights of the Complainant have been fully protected.

By not appearing for the scheduled hearing, the Complainant failed to bear her burden of proof. Consequently, the Complaint must be dismissed.

As the Commission stated in *Mumma v. PPL Electric Utilities Corp.*, Docket No. C-00014869 (Opinion and Order entered January 24, 2002), "It is well-established law that once timely notice of a hearing and the opportunity to be heard have been provided, it is the responsibility of the parties to be present and participate in the hearing." See, *Schneider v. Pa. Pub. Util. Comm'n*, 479 A.2d 10 (Pa. Cmwlth. 1984); *Plummer v. Columbia Gas of Pa., Inc.*, Docket No. Z-00847836 (Opinion and Order entered September 27, 2001). The Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court has made it clear that in administrative hearings, "a party's own negligence is not sufficient good cause as a matter of law for failing to appear at a . . . hearing." *Eat'N Park Hospitality Group, Inc. v. Unemployment Compensation Board of Review*, 970 A.2d 492, 494 (Pa.Cmwlth. 2008).

Due to the waste of the Commission's and Respondent's time, money, and energy occasioned by the Complainant's failure to appear at a hearing of which she had notice, this Complaint will be dismissed with prejudice in accordance with well-established Commission

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<sup>1</sup> Although there was a slight spelling error in the street name on the Hearing Notice, the zip code and rest of the address was correct and there is no indication that the U.S. Post Office was unable to deliver the Notice, as it was not returned to the OALJ in Harrisburg.

precedent. *Jefferson v. UGI Utilities, Inc.*, Docket No. Z-00269892 (Opinion and Order entered December 26, 1995); *Evans v. Bell Atlantic-Pennsylvania, Inc.*, Docket No. C-00957229 (Opinion and Order entered July 12, 1996); *King v. PECO Energy Co*, Docket No. C-00967919 (Opinion and Order entered January 16, 1997); *Kenny v. PPL Electric Utilities Corporation*, Docket No. C-20042399 (Final Order entered October 13, 2004); *Jones v. The Peoples Natural Gas Company d/b/a Dominion Peoples*, Docket No. C-20054885 (Opinion and Order entered February 14, 2006); *El-Ayazra v. West Penn Power Company*, Docket No. F-2015-250-2509292 (Opinion and Order entered June 30, 2016).

### CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

1. The Commission has jurisdiction over the parties to and subject matter of this proceeding. 66 Pa.C.S. § 701.
2. Pursuant to 66 Pa.C.S. § 332(a), the burden of proof in this proceeding is upon the Complainant.
3. By failing to appear at the scheduled hearing and failing to present any evidence, the Complainant has failed to satisfy the burden of proof.
4. Notice properly mailed to a party's last known address and not returned is presumed to have been received. *Meierdierck v. Miller*, 394 Pa. 484, 147 A.2d 406 (1959); *Berkowitz v. Mayflower Securities, Inc.*, 455 Pa. 531, 317 A.2d 584 (1974).
5. The Complainant had notice of the date, location and time of the scheduled hearing.
6. The due process rights of Complainant have been fully protected in this proceeding. *Schneider v. Pa. Pub. Util. Comm'n*, 479 A.2d 10 (Pa.Cmwlth. 1984).

7. A formal Complaint may be dismissed if, after notice and opportunity to be heard, a Complainant fails to appear and prosecute the Complaint. *Mumma v. PPL Electric Utilities Corp.*, Docket No. C-00014869 (Opinion and Order entered January 24, 2002).

8. The failure of the Complainant to appear for a scheduled hearing of which she had notice warrants dismissal of the Complaint with prejudice. *Jefferson v. UGI Utilities, Inc.*, Docket No. Z-00269892 (Opinion and Order entered December 26, 1995).

ORDER

THEREFORE,

IT IS ORDERED:

1. That the motion of Philadelphia Gas Works to dismiss the Complaint filed at Docket No. F-2016-2575154 is granted;
2. That the Complaint of Mary Mitchell against Philadelphia Gas Works at Docket No. F-2016-2575154 is dismissed with prejudice; and
3. That Docket No. F-2016-2575154 be marked closed.

Date: April 26, 2017

/s/  
Marta Guhl  
Administrative Law Judge