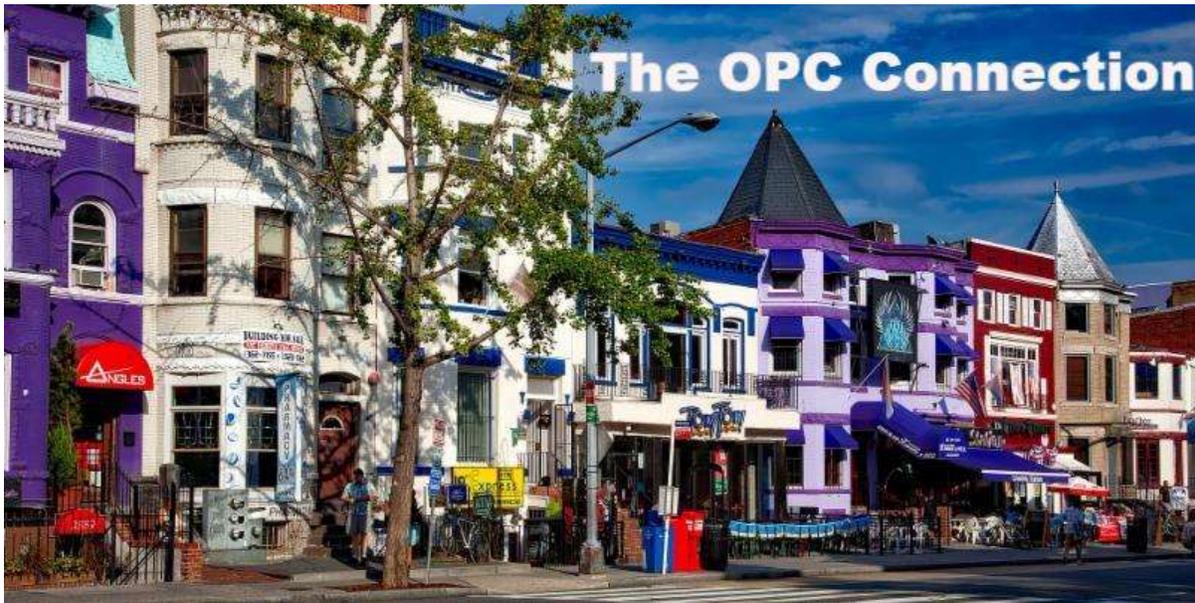




Office of the People's Counsel

ADVOCACY | EDUCATION | PROTECTION



**December 2023**

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**A Note from Your  
People's Counsel  
Sandra Mattavous-Frye**

**Tis' the Season to Be on the  
Lookout for Grinches:  
Utility Scams**

This is a time for fellowship and good cheer as we gather for holiday observances and look forward to a new year. Unfortunately, it's also a time when people are vulnerable



to retail scams. OPC is aware of recent reports of energy sellers attempting to run scams on utility consumers. Therefore, we are reminding consumers to protect their pocketbooks and personal information as these “Grinches” have resurfaced.

These shady business practices show up in different forms. They include door-to-door salespersons masquerading as utility workers, robotic phone calls offering reduced rates, and threats of disconnections. For example, an energy seller allegedly is untruthfully telling DC households the city requires them to switch to clean energy. Another report says a doorknocker insists on seeing your utility bill to determine if you are receiving a city benefit because “your neighborhood has been experiencing high carbon emissions.” Their real goal seems to be to switch you to their energy product without your permission.

Third party suppliers can legally sell alternative resources such as energy generated by solar, wind, or water in the District. These companies hire independent contractors to sign up new customers. However, they must follow certain rules. They are included in OPC’s “Consumer’s [Guide](#) to Third Party Suppliers.

Here are some tips to protect yourself:

- NEVER give your account number or other personal information before verifying you are speaking directly to a Pepco or Washington Gas representative.
- Always request an ID with a company logo from a utility worker.
- If someone claims your service is going to be shut off if you don’t pay immediately, check the balance on your latest bill or call customer service.
- Insists on seeing discount rate offers in writing and do not be pressured to sign any documents or accept limited time promotions until you have had time to review the fine print.
- Consider whether your household will save energy and

money on utilities with a TPS before signing up.

If you think you've been the victim of a utility scam or have questions about a third party supplier, call us at (202) 727-3071. *OPC will advocate, educate, and protect you!*

## In their “ugly sweaters,” OPC staff wish all Happy Holidays!



### The Cold Facts

With the cold weather upon us, OPC reminds consumers that they are protected from utility disconnections on certain days. DC law bars Pepco and Washington Gas from disconnecting residential electric or natural gas service on the day

preceding and, on the day, when there is a forecast of extreme temperatures in the District, and when the National Weather Service

forecast is 32 degrees Fahrenheit or below. Shut offs also are prohibited around a holiday or weekend day.

These protections are included in the [Consumer Bill of Rights](#) which provides safeguards for consumers of natural gas, electric, and telecommunications services in the District of Columbia.

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## Moving Toward a Carbon Free DC

At the recent COP28 Local Climate Action Summit in Dubai, Mayor Muriel Bowser unveiled the new Carbon Free DC [plan](#) – a bold strategy aimed at significantly reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the District.

Importantly, its measures also protect utility ratepayers, ensuring that the transition to a greener future is more equitable, affordable, and resilient. Mayor Bowser joins hundreds of local and national government leaders deploying hometown solutions to climate change.

A priority of the District's plan is to reduce emissions from buildings, the largest source of GHG in the District (71%), by adopting net-zero energy construction codes, energy efficiency improvements, and transitioning existing buildings to zero-carbon systems. In addition to building upgrades, Carbon Free DC aims to bring housing, jobs, and daily needs closer together by enhancing transit-oriented development, while also improving access to walking, biking, and zero-emission public transit options. This strategy not only saves time, improves safety, and reduces transit emissions but also aims to lower living, energy, transportation, and healthcare costs for residents.



The plan also focuses on reducing the emissions intensity of everyday goods and services without imposing undue costs on consumers. The strategy includes assessing the District's consumption-based emissions that result from carbon in food and household products, for example, and setting achievable emissions reduction targets through improving recycling, reuse, and food waste management.

So, how will this plan impact the average utility consumer in the District? More energy-efficient buildings and homes lead to lower energy bills for residents and business owners. Accessible neighborhoods and zero-emission public transit will provide cheaper and greener transportation options, further reducing daily living costs for DC residents.

OPC believes the plan represents a comprehensive approach to meeting ambitious climate change goals while maintaining a focus on affordability and equity for all residents.



## **The Water Connection**

### **OPC's Water Services Division is Watching EPA's Look at Lead in Drinking Water**

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has recently issued proposed Lead and Copper Rule Improvements (LCRI), marking a significant advancement in protecting public health from the dangers of lead exposure in drinking water. Central to the LCRI is achieving the ambitious goal of replacing 100% of lead pipes in the United States within 10 years. Lead pipes are the primary source of lead in drinking water. The effort aligns well with DC Water's ongoing efforts to be lead-free by 2030. This initiative is bolstered by the requirement for water systems to compile and regularly update

comprehensive inventories of their lead service lines. These inventories, due initially by October 16, 2024, are important for executing efficient and equitable pipe replacement and must include a transparent service line replacement plan, identifying materials for all lines, especially those of unknown composition.

The LCRI also proposes a more comprehensive collection and analysis of tap water samples at sites with lead service lines, using a higher value for determining compliance with regulations. EPA is proposing to lower the lead level threshold which would necessitate immediate public notification and actions to mitigate lead exposure, such as accelerating pipe replacements. For systems with repeat red flags, the LCRI would require additional consumer outreach and the distribution of certified lead-reducing filters to all consumers.

These improvements are set to complement and reinforce DC Water's ongoing efforts in lead pipe replacement, marking a coordinated approach to tackling lead contamination in drinking water and safeguarding public health. EPA expects to finalize the Lead and Copper Rule Improvements before October 16, 2024. OPC's Water Services Division will continue to track the EPA action.

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## The Consumer Connection

### Capturing Feedback from the Community



### Here's an Email from a Ward 4 Resident:

*I am writing to express my profound gratitude and appreciation for the swift and diligent actions taken to assist me in avoiding water service disconnection. Your combined efforts and assistance have been exemplary, and I am truly touched by the support extended to me during this challenging time.*

*I would like to thank Valca Valentine and Linda Jefferson from the Office of the People's Counsel. Your proactive approach in requesting financial assistance on my behalf and your dedication to ensuring the swift processing of my LIHEAP application have been invaluable. I am deeply grateful for the time and effort you invested in securing the necessary support to prevent disconnection of my water service.*

*Furthermore, I would like to express my gratitude to the Greater Washington Urban League Splash Fund and Council Chairman Phil Mendelson's Constituent Fund for offering emergency assistance and addressing my urgent request. To OPC and the Office of Ward 4 Councilmember Janeese Lewis George, thank you for your collaboration and for bringing this matter to the attention of the relevant parties.*

*While I could never have anticipated finding myself in this situation, it is heartening to witness the coordination displayed by individuals who are committed to supporting the community, ensuring that essential services are preserved, and making a positive difference in the lives of others.*



## **Washington Gas Rates Are Going Up**

Just days ago, we reported that the new year will bring an increase in your natural gas bill because the DC Public Service

Commission approved a Washington Gas rate hike request. We also cited OPC's successful battle to get the amount knocked down to a more affordable figure. In case you missed it, the details are [here](#).



## **PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION**

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### **OPC is Advocating for Consumers in the Following Cases:**

#### **Formal Case No. 1156: Pepco's Application to Implement a Multiyear Rate Plan**

On November 14, OPC filed Final Comments on the Final Atrium Report. OPC believes that Bill Stabilization Adjustment is structurally deficient and should be eliminated.

On December 12, OPC filed a Notice of Intention to Intervene with the DC Court of Appeals in the Pepco v. PSC case which comes from the decision in 1156.

#### **Formal Case No. 1176: Pepco's Application to Implement a Multiyear Rate Plan**

On December 5, OPC filed a Letter of Support for the Apartment and Office Building Association's Motion for Enlargement of Time. This support comes from OPC's belief that Pepco has ignored the procedural schedule and used deceptive practices in the document production process.

#### **Formal Case No. 1154: Washington Gas Light Company's Application for Approval of PROJECTpipes 2 Plan.**

On November 16, OPC filed a Motion in Opposition of Washington Gas's Motion for an Extension of the Project Pipes 2 Plan. OPC argues that Washington Gas has not addressed existing leaks and until Washington Gas submits an audit report for Pipes 2, no extension should be given.

**Formal Case No. 874, Gas Acquisition Strategies of District of Columbia Natural Gas, a Division of Washington Gas Light Company; Formal Case No. 1167, Implementation of the Climate Business Plan.**

On November 29, OPC filed comments, including suggestions that WGL's compliance filings should include documents on renewable natural gas and details on the origin of procured national gas.

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**OPC Employee Spotlight:  
Rakisha Philson**

OPC managers appreciate the efforts and hard work that each division puts into making the agency function at a high level. And when expanding a division leads to new ideas and creative initiatives to engage employees, the office grows to even higher heights. A case in point is the addition of Rakisha Philson as Human

Resources Specialist.

Rakisha's core duties in the HR Division include assisting with the recruitment and employee onboarding processes, benefits administration, and the development of workplace policies governing employee conduct. Her favorite responsibility is employee engagement, and she enjoys communicating directly with staff and being responsive to any questions or concerns they may have.

Rakisha was born and raised in the District. And in her hometown, she embarked on a diverse career journey with the goal of helping people. Rakisha's love for children landed her a position with the Southeast Children's Fund for five years. Next was a 15-year stint with the DC Department of Employment Services as a Senior Unemployment Claims Specialist. This position required

tedious detail, analytical thinking, and a deep understanding of employment laws. In her next position, Rakisha welcomed more up close and personal people experiences at Chick-fil-A where she oversaw talent acquisition and training as the Talent and Development Director.

Rakisha is now helping to create memorable work experiences for OPC employees. After hours, she relishes creating special memories with her two daughters, baking, trying new recipes, and binge-watching crime shows.

“I look forward to growing and learning with OPC. Although I’ve only been here less than a year, the warm, welcoming, friendly staff and easy-to-talk-to management make me feel like I’ve been a part of the team for years.”

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## **OPC In Your Neighborhood!**

OPC welcomes opportunities to speak at your Advisory Neighborhood Commission, civic association, community group activity, or meeting onsite or virtually. We can give updates on utility issues, and trends, and highlight how we serve DC consumers. Call (202) 727-3071 if your group would like our staff to make an onsite or virtual presentation.

UDC Senior Companion Program  
4200 Connecticut Ave NW  
Wednesday, January 17, 2024  
11:00 am - 12:30 pm

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## **Photo Gallery**



OPC's table at the Mayor's Annual Senior Holiday Celebration at the DC Armory.



Administrative Officer Cherry Belle was the winner of the OPC employee ugly sweater contest.



OPC Chief of Staff Eric Coard (left) was interviewed for an NBC Washington TV feature on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the former Capital Centre in Landover, MD. As a student-athlete at DeMatha High School, Eric is recorded as making the first basket in a game between his school and Wilson High School. Pete Strickland and Bobby Kinzer also played in the game that preceded a Washington Bullets contest. See the report [here](#).



William Ellis of Pepco and Damali Harding of the Regulatory Assistance Project, who were panelists at OPC's Youth Climate [Summit](#) in April, reunited at the American Association of Blacks in Energy Policy Summit, with OPC's Doxie McCoy, right.

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### **Connect With OPC!**

Do you have feedback or an idea for an article that could be featured in an upcoming edition of the OPC Connection? We want to hear from you! Just drop our editorial team an email @ [info@opc-dc.gov](mailto:info@opc-dc.gov) or X/tweet us [@DCOPC](#).

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