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No rush yet for co-op rate protests

By J.R. Logan

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Members of Kit Carson Electric Cooperative still have more than a month to file protests against a proposed rate increase.

Letters advising members of the rate hike were sent Oct. 13, but CEO Lu's Reyes said Oct. 14 that the official "advice notice" will not go to the state until mid-November. Members have 20 days from the time the advice notice is filed to turn in an official complaint with the commission.

An article in the Oct. 14 edition of *The Taos News* incorrectly stated that members could protest only 20 days from the postmark date on the notices sent Oct. 13.

Those eager to make their case against the rate hike, however, can do so before the advice notice is filed next month.

The protests should include the following information: the name, mailing address and phone number of any protesters and the same information for their attorney; the name of the co-op and identification of the specific proposed rate change (residential, commercial, etc.); a statement of the effect the rate hike would have on the member; and a statement as to why the rate hike is "unjust, unreasonable, or otherwise unlawful."

Protest forms are available at the co-op.

The letter should also spell out the efforts taken to resolve the issue within the co-op, and a description of the "relief" the protester seeks from the commission.

The statute states that there should be a "good faith effort" from both the member and the co-op to resolve the issue at the local level. The co-op has seven days to respond directly to those members who turn in a protest.

The original letter, plus 10 copies, must be sent to the Public Regulation Commission in Santa Fe. According to the statutes, the protests should either be hand-delivered to the commission's office or sent by first-class mail. The address is: NMPRC Records, P.O. Box 1269, Santa Fe, NM 87504.

A spokesman for the commission said 1 percent of a rate class, or 25 customers (whichever is less) must file a protest with the commission before a case can be docketed.

After complaints have been turned in, the commission will determine whether it will review the rate change on the grounds of the protest. A prehearing on the issue could be scheduled to determine if an official hearing is necessary.

The statute does not specify whether protesters must be present in Santa Fe if a hearing is scheduled.