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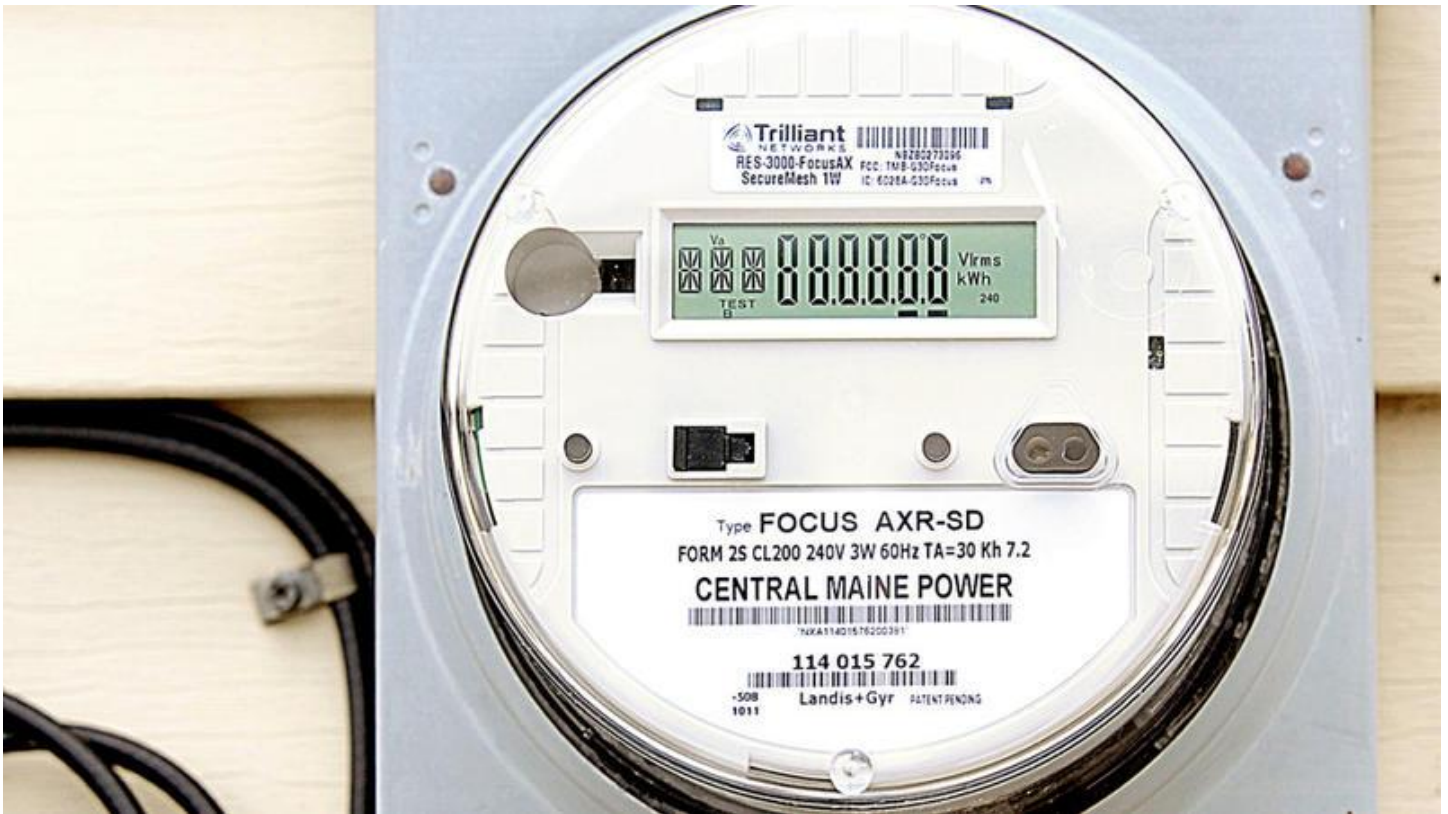
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CMP Being Sued For Fraud Regarding High Customer Bills

By [A.J. HIGGINS \(/PEOPLE/AJ-HIGGINS/\)](/PEOPLE/AJ-HIGGINS/) • 17 HOURS AGO

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(http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/mpbn/files/styles/x_large/public/201808/WEBsmartmeter_1200x675.jpg)

Attorneys filing the suit said that the power company intentionally misled customers by suggesting that their electric bills were higher due to almost anything other than the company's faulty metering and billing system.

CMP



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3:35

CMP Being Sued For Fraud Regarding High Customer Bills

Central Maine Power Company's (CMP) handling of thousands of customer complaints regarding higher charges last winter has generated a new class action lawsuit.

Attorneys filing the suit said that the power company intentionally misled customers by suggesting that their electric bills were higher due to almost anything other than the company's faulty metering and billing system.

CMP began the week with a televised apology (<http://www.mainepublic.org/post/central-maine-power-ceo-apologizes-poor-response-billing-system-concerns#stream/0>) to more than 100,000 customers who complained that their bills had skyrocketed in the aftermath of last October's storm, which cause widespread and lasting outages.

"This past winter, we implemented a new customer care system, when you raised issues and concerns, we didn't respond as well as we should have – and we're very sorry about that," said the ad's narrator.

Three law firms, including Lipman & Katz of Augusta, are looking for more than an apology from CMP. Speaking for all three firms, Attorney Sumner Lipman says that the fraud complaint will amend a lawsuit filed last month, which claimed that the company had overcharged customers and failed to acknowledge that its metering and billing systems were at fault for the billing spikes. Lipman said that customer service representatives fielding complaints were instructed to attribute the higher charges to a variety of explanations including "bad wiring" inside callers' homes, inefficient appliances, or kids playing video games. And Lipman says that if they didn't pay their bills after that, they received disconnection notices.

"That was part of an overall scheme to force people to pay money they didn't owe, and if they didn't pay it, then they'd get a disconnect notice, which would mean they could lose power during the cold winter," Lipman said.

The action could potentially affect hundreds of thousands of CMP customers who Lipman said were never told about the company's billing software conflicts, which he said prompted thousands of calls or emails to his firm seeking legal advice.

"I don't think there's a rational basis for sending out a disconnect notice when you know your equipment is faulty and caused the overcharge," he said. "I think it was just part of a plan to collect money that they weren't legally entitled to."



(<http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/mpbn/files/story/CMP-1-e1534264813262.jpg>)

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CREDIT CMP

At CMP headquarters, spokesperson Gail Rice says that the company's training program prepares its customer service representatives to help the public to identify potential issues that could be inflating their bills.

"CMP vehemently denies any allegations of fraud," said Rice.

She also questioned the timing of the fraud lawsuit, given that the Public Utilities Commission is currently in the midst of its own investigation into the billing charges.

Rice said customer complaints about CMP charges are fairly predictable.

"We value our customers, we're committed to accurate billing and fair treatment, and it's important to point out that customer calls about high bills are very common during the winter months or even any time of the year," Rice said. "CMP representatives are trained to talk with customers and to help them understand the many factors that affect their energy use, so to malign our employees' efforts as fraud is quite honestly an insult to the caring representatives who make it their mission to help people every day."

Lipman said that his firm, as well as the Auburn-based firm of Trafton, Matzen, Belleau & Frenette, and the New York firm of Napoli and Shkolnik, have filed their class action fraud complaint in Cumberland County Superior Court.

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