

Austin Energy customer service fail: The tale of a \$12,000 water bill

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[10](#)



Paul Saustrup owns property in Southeast Austin where he waters cows from a pump that fills his tank once a month. He experienced an extremely high water bill of \$12,000 that led to a monthslong back-and-forth with the city. RALPH BARRERA / AMERICAN-STATESMAN

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Highlights

Customer service representatives repeatedly failed to resolve the issue.

User had hundreds of dollars seized from his bank account over the mistaken bill.

It took months before the utility discovered that a city water main break had caused the problem.

For nearly a year, the monthly bills for water on Paul Saustrup's vacant agricultural lot in Southeast Austin were predictable: \$7 here, \$6 there.

Then came one that made him look twice: \$12,111.68.

"I just got a literally shocking water bill," he told a customer service representative in a Nov. 22 call to Austin Energy, which handles billing for both utilities. "I think it was a clerical error (or) they read the wrong meter or something."

Austin Energy is amid a reckoning of its customer service policies, after initially dismissing accounts of meter reading problems that spiked the September bills of thousands of residents citywide. Since then, the utility has acknowledged it was too slow to see the billing problems, refunded customers and said it will retrain agents to pay more attention to indications of system errors.

Saustруп's case, while an isolated incident, provides insight into a system that, even facing the most unbelievable of charges, is structured to insist that the customer is on the hook for unexplained water use spikes. For months, customer service agents failed to return Saustруп's phone calls, even as the utility added late fees to the bill in question and withdrew hundreds of dollars from his bank account.

Using the Texas Public Information Act, the American-Statesman obtained [transcripts of all of Saustруп's phone calls](#) with the utility.

On that first Nov. 22 call, a customer service agent named Robert looked at the account information for a few minutes before he said he'd found an explanation for the spike. Meter readers missed Saustруп's meter for about seven months.

"It read at basically the total amount and billed at a tiered level," the agent told Saustруп.

Saustруп knew better. Even seven months of water use wouldn't add up to \$12,000, no matter how high the tier. When he argued that point, the agent said he didn't know what happened but would mark the account for escalation. Someone would be in touch.

[ALSO READ: Austin: Meter readers made up numbers, causing fall water bill spikes](#)

Three weeks later, no one had called Saustруп back. But the utility deducted \$800 from his bank account without warning. Because of that, Saustруп's rent check bounced. He called again on Dec. 12.

The customer service agent, Debra, put him on hold while she called a support line, according to the transcript.

"We should be putting him on a payment arrangement," the support agent said. "Let him know, we're still looking at it."

When Debra came back on the line with Saustруп, he asked her who was looking into it. It wasn't assigned to anyone yet, she told him. An agent would call him back within 24 hours, she said.

A week later, no one had called. But the utility sent him a notice that he owed a \$600 late fee on top of the \$12,000. So he called again on Dec. 18.

"If you look at my file, or whatever, you should see that I have called several times and expressed extreme concern that my bill went from \$6 to \$12,000," he told the agent, Toni. "All I have is a faucet in a field to water cows."

"Have you been monitoring how much water you've been using?" the agent asked, after pulling up his account. She told Saustруп he should be checking his own meter every three days or so to make sure he's not overbilled.

Saustруп, who owns a laundromat that sometimes uses up to 60,000 gallons a month, is familiar with water use. The bill for his 15-acre parcel claimed he'd used nearly 800,000 gallons — more than an Olympic swimming pool and as much as an average American household uses in eight years.

"It would have flooded the whole neighborhood to use the amount they are claiming I used," he said. "There's obviously a big error somewhere."

The agent put him on hold for a few minutes. Then she came back and said an empty lot with a few cows isn't really a residential property. She recommended that he call back and follow automated prompts to reach the commercial billing department.

Later that day, a fourth customer service agent, Mark, called Saustруп. A frantic email Saustруп had sent earlier in the month to elected officials had paid off: Mayor Steve Adler's staff had intervened to ask someone at the utility to give him a phone call. Mark said he'd look into Saustруп's case and would be in touch soon.

Saustруп thanked him, but was beginning to tire of the nonanswers. "I lost my faith and trust in the system that would ... bill me \$12,000," he told Mark, "and then raid my bank account at night for the maximum amount they could get after taking a month to not call me back."

Mark called a couple of times to check in over the next month, each time saying investigators were working on it. By Jan. 22 he had an answer: Investigators hadn't found anything, so Saustруп owed the money.

The utility would spread the costs over the months it didn't read the meter, to reduce the impact of the highest-rate tiers, but the total wouldn't change much, Mark said. "The bill is still almost \$11,000," he said. "However, on this end, there is no more to dispute because we know we have the right meter. ... We know the beginning and ending reads."

Mark suggested that Saustруп try his luck at a monthslong administrative hearing process.

Saustруп was incredulous. "There's no way," he said. "There's no way that \$12,000 worth of water went through that meter."

"I can't tell you any more than that," Mark responded.

MORE SYSTEM CHANGES: New Austin Water billing safeguards coming amid unexplained spikes

Later that night, Saustруп's wife, Sasha, went to an Electric Utility Commission meeting to plead with commissioners to do something.

"I don't know if the meter is broken, the meter reader is broken, but certainly the utility department customer service is broken," she said. "It seems like there should be some kind of stopgap measure where, if a bill comes out to \$12,000 one month, they might investigate."

After those words in front of public officials and utility executives, Austin Energy took a second look at the Saustруп case. By the next month, staff members told the commission they had discovered that a water main break on an Austin Water Utility line had caused the Saustрупs' meter to malfunction.

The utility credited them \$12,121.76. (It's unclear why that precise amount.)

Paul Saustrup is continuing to negotiate over a subsequent unexplained \$300 charge. But other than that, his bills have returned to their normal \$6 a month.

Austin Energy officials said this week that Saustrup's case was unusual and represented failures by multiple people. Agents should have called him back. He should have been immediately flagged for escalation and given a single agent to contact. The drafts from his bank account should have stopped at \$100, but multiple drafts were created to cover skipped bills from March to October, allowing the utility to withdraw \$800 in one swoop.

"It was one mistake after another," Austin Energy Deputy General Manager Kerry Overton said. "It's very rare that I would see something with this number of mistakes made on an account."

The training of customer service agents, which has typically focused on finding a problem on the customer's side, will begin to help agents recognize whether a problem on the utility's side is possible, Overton said.

Two former contracted meter readers made up readings for August water use in certain neighborhoods, which caused overbilling in September for more than 7,000 customers when accurate readings were made. Austin Energy insisted multiple times to residents who challenged their bills and to the Statesman that errors in the system couldn't be to blame, before investigators finally determined the truth.

City auditors last month analyzed Austin Energy's water billing procedures, in response to concerns from City Council Members Ellen Troxclair and Alison Alter. Auditors looked at a sample of 41 of 3,000 complaints made in 2017.

"Austin Energy handled every complaint in accordance with their policies," auditors concluded.

TRANSCRIPT OF SAUSTRUP INTERACTIONS WITH AUSTIN ENERGY

Call Transcript

Name of the caller: Paul Saustrup

Name of the agent: Robert

Service Address: [REDACTED]

Customer Phone Number: [REDACTED]

Date of the call: 11/22/2017

Agent: Good Afternoon, than you for calling city of Austin Utilities, my name is Robert. How many I help you?

Caller: Hey Robert . I just got a literally a shocking water bill I've been having some problems, lot of confusion with my account. Getting it separated from a previous user. I haven't received a bill in about 5 or 6 months. I've called several times. Today I just received like 10 or 12 bills in the mail and it shows that I used about an average of about 7 dollars of water a month because it is just a vacant lot and then one month 12000 dollars. So I think, I'd like to think that it was uhh clerical error, they read the wrong meter or something. My meter is very confusing. I want to know who can help me

AGENT: let me take a look for you, let me pull up your account. You said you have your account, you received your invoices. Is that correct? You have your account number there?

CALLER: I Do

AGENT: may I have it please?

CALLER: [REDACTED]

AGENT: Now, you weren't receiving your bills for a while? But now you are, is that correct.

CALLER: cor..Yes I had

AGENT: Ok

CALLER: Well We had a credit of 300. Well here's the deal. We brought a property that had a water and electric account but the water went , the electric went with with somebody that bought the acreage to one side of us.. The water stayed with us. So it took a little while to get it separated. Tony at Austin Energy Commercial helped us get the water and electric bill separated. When they got them separated, we had paid like 400 dollars worth of electric bills which they corrected. So, so my account goes from having a 357 credit and using 7 dollars a month and suddenly one month my bill goes to 12000. So I called and asked them why I wasn't receiving a bill and they said well you have a 300 dollar credit and I said OK. So I thought at 7 dollars a month which is just water for livestock water no wastewater just water. Umm and so I cant. These are hard for me to read. I cant tell the billing cycle it happened.

Ummm but I guess you can see. Do I show a 12000 dollar balance on my account? Do you see that?

AGENT: Let me take a look for you. Let me go ahead and verify some information if I could. Could I get the service address from you please?

CALLER: [REDACTED]

AGENT: ok, can I have the last 4 numbers of your social security number?

CALLER: [REDACTED]

AGENT: Thank You. All right lets take a look here. I do show there is a current balance of 12111.68.

CALLER: OK, so this is a vacant lot that has one faucet on it for watering wildlife.

AGENT : You say its one, water water faucet for for live stock, is that correct?

CALLER: Yes. Like I, I don't . I think it would be physically impossible if it had run night and day for all these months to I think

AGENT : Ok

CALLER: I think theres gotta be a simple clerical error like they read neighbors meter or you know somebody transposed a decimal point or something that.

AGENT : Ok lets see here. Hmm hmmm. I'm still with you. I'm just checking out some information.

CALLER: oh yeah no worries. I guess you read yesterday's paper?

AGENT : Ahh no, actually I didn't.

CALLER: Well there is a big story in there about where there were pockets all over the city where people were being hit with stunning water bills and they didn't. The water department was trying to figure out.

AGENT : Ok let me check out (intelligible word). Can I get your full name please?

CALLER: [REDACTED]

AGENT : No No, your full name, your name.

CALLER: I'm sorry I'm Paul Saustrup

AGENT : Ok

CALLER: my wife is Sasha

AGENT : Oh Ok , no that's fine. I just want to make sure I have the right account information

CALLER: Yeah, Yeah

AGENT : Ok Let me take you on a brief hold, give me a few minutes I'm gonna check on this for you. Bear with me please

CALLER: sure man, thanks

AGENT : you're welcome

CALLER: appreciate your time

AGENT : OK Mr. Saustrup

CALLER: Yes

AGENT: Thank you so much for holding. I appreciate your patience and I apologize for the long hold time I was just doing a lot of extensive research as to what transpiring and it looks like here. Um some things were happening and then kind of um kind of coincides with what you were saying earlier when you weren't getting billed. It looks like apparently you weren't um weren't able to read the meters um . It looks from around march and basically what's happening is this is all being back billed since then um for all that usage. But what's also happened as a result is you know the reason your bill is also so high is because when you got back billed is that you know the water usage is based on the tierd system and what instead of reading it befo, instead of billing it correctly the way it should have back then, what it had did was had lumped everything together. I think like somewhere around the neighborhood of 700,000 gallons of water and it billed it at that tier system. Umm so what I am going to do here is go ahead a submit an escalation on this.

CALLER: Yeah

AGENT: Basically umm that's the long answer. The short answer is that we were not able to read the meters and then finally when we did able to get a read, it read at basically the total amount and billed it at that tiered level of usage which (inaudible)

CALLER: Well that's not acceptable to me because we read the meter all the time.

AGENT: Right

CALLER: I mean its easy to read, its accessible, why were they

AGENT: I couldn't tell you. I Honestly, I'm not. Uhh respectfully speaking Mr Saustrup, I'm not out in the field and I couldn't agree or deny

CALLER: Sure

AGENT: .well I could see where you have problems reading it or no we should be be able to read it. But the only thing, what I can do at this point is I can submit an escalation on this we can get somebody from the water department to go ahead and look at this and see what we can do to get this taken care of.

CALLER: and do they have a way to contact me?

AGENT: That's what uh I wanna get a good contact number for you, uhh what would be the best number? Is the number you are calling on the number (inaudible) the best number to, well actually, lets do this just to be sure we're not missing anything. What's the best contact number?

CALLER:

and also I'd like to include the number I am calling from, the that's my home and my cell because this is too big of a deal to slip through the cracks. I've gotta gotta know know that they are going to be able to reach me

AGENT: Yeah, um sure

CALLER: The other thing I would like you to include in the notes is that besides the tier misapplication there is absolutely no way we used 700,000 gallons. It's a faucet feeding account. We have a child's swimming pool, one of those 5 or 10 gallon plastic kiddie pools that we fill every couple of days. So Umm, I feel that its not only the misapplication of the tiers but also uhh gross miss estimation of our possible water usage. There's no structure there. Its strictly being used you know for pets and wild life.

AGENT: I understand

CALLER: So I mean even if it was billed at..I saw one that showed some crazy tiers your know but um there is just no way we are use that amount. So I think they are reading the wrong meter and they sub subtracted the wrong one from the previous reading or something. Yeah 10, 739000 gallons, that for, yeah, that's. Umm what month, month did that supposedly happen in?

AGENT: Well that was back billing that's from

CALLER: Ohh

AGENT: that's what what I said earlier. That's back bill from March, I believe from March all the way to October

CALLER: Well you see I called them on almost a monthly basis and say hey I'm not getting my bill and they say you have a credit, you have a credit, that's probably why you are not getting a billed, why you're not getting billed. So

AGENT: right, that was (intelligible word said) incorrect because we weren't able to read the meter and that's what its coming down to and we need to go ahead and submit this request here for ya

CALLER: Yeah

AGENT: Um but I've got your contact numbers here for you so and I put both of them down and a request and you should be able to get a contact on that. Just to be sure I have the contacts -

CALLER: No,

AGENT: Ok

CALLER: is the home number, yes sir

AGENT: Allrighty

CALLER: Cool man, I hope you have a great thanksgiving even though its alittle shocking for me.

AGENT: Yeah

CALLER: I know we'll, we'll get to a simple solution, there's gotta be a simple answer and also just for your information, if you see a paper laying around on somebody's desk, there is a big story on this exact thing happening to hundreds of people it was in yesterday's paper.

AGENT: Ok, yeah no thank you for saying, I mean usually I work the late shift and as soon as I get home I pass out so ahh I'll definitely look into that. But uh we will definitely get this taken care of. Im going to go ahead and submit your request like I said, we will reach out and I am sure we can come to a satisfactory conclusion for both parties.

CALLER: Have a great one.

"I just got a literally shocking water bill"

"I do show a current balance of 12111.68"

"I guess you read yesterday's paper?"

"It read at basically the total amount and billed it at that tiered level"

Saustrop calls back Dec. 11

"they automatically drafted my account \$800 which really messed me up"

"Let them know we are still looking at it okay?"

Saustrop calls back Dec. 18

"I got a \$600 late fee on my \$12,000 bill"

"I have called several times and expressed extreme concern"

"Have you been monitoring how much water you've been using?"

"I would recommend at this time using our commercial services"

Agent Mark calls Dec. 18

"executive escalations department"

"I lost my faith and trust in the system"

Mark checks in Dec. 19

Mark checks in Jan. 3

Mark calls back Jan. 22

"the bill is still almost \$11,000"

"I don't have enough to make that change myself"

"Have a good day"

AGENT: alright you do the same I'm gonna go head and (inaudible) this call Mr Sastrup. Lastly there is a survey at the end of this call if you would like to take it, go right ahead and if not, go ahead and disconnect, Ok?

CALLER: Sure, than you.

AGENT: You're welcome Sir, bye bye.

Name of the caller: Paul Saustrup

Name of the agent: Debra Ross

Caller Phone Number: [REDACTED]

Date of the call: 12/11/2017
[REDACTED]

Agent: Good morning, thank you for calling the City of Austin Utilities. My name is Debra, how can i help you?

Caller: Yeah, I need to talk to somebody in escalations. We, we got a \$12,000 water bill and I called and they said somebody was gonna look into it and get back with me, they never got back with me. And then I just noticed that they took \$800 out of my bank account so ...

Agent: Okay, definitely umm let me umm look at your account so I can see who needs to be in touch with you in regards to the water bill. What is the umm account number?

Caller: Okay it's [REDACTED]

Agent: One moment. Okay, just have to verify account information, your name?

Caller: Is Paul Saustrup

Agent: Thank you Mr. Saustrup, can you verify your address for me?

Caller: The service address or my billing address or which address?

Agent: Both, I'm sorry.

Caller: Okay, think the service address [REDACTED]

Agent: Okay, the service address for the account number that you provided to me is a different address.

Caller: [REDACTED]

Agent: Yes, can you give me the entire address?

Caller: What's the address on [REDACTED]? We think it's [REDACTED], it's a dirt road, it's uh not really a real road, [REDACTED] Is there a service address?

Agent: For the account we just have to have the address verified.

Caller: Okay, umm I have my meter number, it was just changed by the addressing Toni, the addressing department, and she never gave me my address. I have my account number, I talked to Toni in commercial umm I talked to addressing. I've got my meter number. It used to be known as [REDACTED] umm

Agent: Okay, thank you, and then for security of the account may I have the last four digits of your social security number?

Caller: [REDACTED]

Agent: Thank you so much. One moment, okay and no one has contacted you umm since ...

Caller: Correct, no but they automatically drafted my account \$800 which really messed me up without anybody talking to me and I'm really ... I, I want to file a formal complaint about the way this matter has been handled and I also need to talk to somebody in the escalations department.

Agent: Okay,

Caller: It's shocking for a customer to get a \$12,000 bill and now I'm getting a a registered letter that they won't give me because I don't have an ID that has this address that you just assigned,

Agent: Okay ...

Caller: So I think you might have sent me a registered letter, but I gotta notify you that I cannot receive the registered letter because I don't have ID hat shows the address that no one in the addressing has provided me yet. Can you give me my address [REDACTED] just so i can have it in my records here? I have my meter number

Agent: You you have to provide me with the address and I can verify it but I can't give you the address.

Caller: Well we know it's in about [REDACTED]

Agent: Yeah, it is but I couldn't tell you the exact address you would have to have that on file, sorry.

Caller: Right, well nobody ever gave that to me, I didn't receive a bill for 8 months, and then I got a \$12,000 bill so ... I had a \$300 credit, and I was getting a \$6 a month bill, so I thought the \$300 credit was gonna be good for about 3 years then I got a \$12,000 bill. I think a meter reader made a mistake but ...

Agent: Okay, let me see who umm will be assigned to this case for you, it definitely is it is a escalation, can you hold on a moment?

Caller: Yeah they told me last week they were gonna be assigning escalations and I'd receive contacts.

Agent: You said you haven't received any contact from anyone?

Caller: Correct, I have not I was told I would,

Agent: Okay, can you hold on so I can see who will be responding

Caller: Yeah, I need help, if you can help me with.

Agent: Okay hold on. (On hold several minutes)

Support Line: Thank you for calling city of Austin Support line this is Joseph, how can I help you Miss. Ross?

Agent: Hi Joseph, I have account number umm [REDACTED]

Support Line: Okay, let me pull it up and see what we have here. Okay, so let's see. Customer calling to follow up on a case escalation... umm no one has been in touch with him. Escalation created date, auto pay for \$800 from his account, billed for \$10,000, oh \$11,000 back billed? Need assistance... inaudible words, he's using water for livestock?

Agent: Mhm, oh yeah, I didn't ask. It's possible

Support line: Cause I'm looking at the note below yours.

Agent: Oh

Support Line: Okay, so we just barely filed this back in November, okay interesting nothing has happened with it, so I will get with the department about that. Let's see here; find out what's going on with that case. We should be putting him up on a payment arrangement while we work this out. So let's see here it suddenly jumped up on November, water ... Check in with your customer and let him know we are still looking at it okay. Are you there?

Agent: Yeah, I'm here.

Support Line: Let them know we are still looking at it okay?

Agent: Okay.

Support Line: okay

Agent: Hi ... Mr. Saustrop?

Caller: Yes

Agent: Thank you so much for holding, okay so I do have someone looking into the case to find out what we need to do to have somebody reach out to you, and umm what there working on for you. And I just wanted to check back with you. So do you mind to continue to hold?

Caller: No, but can I leave my, I'm at work. Can I leave my number?

Agent: Okay sure.

Caller: It's [REDACTED] it should be attached to the account permantly, if you could do that that would be great.

Agent: Okay

Caller: It's it's [REDACTED]

Agent: Okay

Caller: And are you gonna talk to the person? Who is the person that's looking into it?

Agent: Umm that's what we're gonna have it assigned to someone; we don't have it assigned to anyone yet.

Caller: Okay.

Caller: So if you could make em, let em know of my concerns. My concerns are: that we, this is just a vacant lot with, no structure, no nothing, no sewer. We use that to fill a water bowl for our livestock. So there's absolutely no way that we used 88,000 gallons of water or whatever.

Agent: Okay.

Caller: That's a vacant lot with one faucet in it.

Agent: Okay.

Caller: So umm, and then also the other thing if you can make a note on the account, I was drafted \$800 out of my account yesterday without anybody contacting me and that's really upsetting. And I guess I need to talk to somebody about that. I need to file a formal complaint; I don't think that's any way to conduct business. When I called and they said don't worry. We're gonna put this to the escalation department, we'll call you we won't do anything. And then the first thing you did was take my rent money out of my account so.

Agent: Okay I'll note that as well.

Caller: I need to file a formal complaint with whoever I can do that with .

Agent: Okay. And umm I'll let the person know, they should be giving you a call back all of your concerns, and I've made note of those. Anything else?

Caller: Yes, can you transfer me to a supervisor or whatever the channels are to for a customer to file a formal complaint?

Agent: Okay so what that would be would be umm the escalation person that is to be giving you a call back, you can do that with them, umm and so we just don't have uh they should be giving you a call back within the next 24 hours, to let you know that they received your case.

Caller: (shouts Hey) That's what they told me last week, and they didn't.

Agent: Okay

Caller: So would you make a note on my account, would you make a note on my account that I'm upset and wish to file a formal complaint against the billing department.

Agent: Okay,

Caller: Thank you.

Agent: You're welcome, anything else?

Caller: Nope, but thank you and I hope you have a great day.

Agent: Okay, you too Mr. Sastrup.

Caller: Alright bye

Agent: Bye.

Agent: Hi Joseph,

Support Line: Mhm

Agent: Okay so he said he wanted to disconnect because he said he's at work.

Support Line: Okay not a problem. (Mumbling to himself) so he has current phone numbers on his person record right? (silence, no response from agent) Is that right? Miss Ross?

Agent: I'm sorry, what did you say?

Support Line: His phone number is current on his person record right?

Agent: the 7518? Yes.

Support Line: Yeah, we should have offered him a payment arrangement at least in the meantime. Umm so what I'll do is I'll call him to go ahead to do that because yeah, we haven't addressed his case yet right?

Agent: Right.

Support Line: But we still need to get him on a payment arrangement so that he doesn't have any collection activity or send a 30 day postponement to collections so that they can know that we're working this out. So that's just something for you to know about okay, and umm we'll go ahead and make sure the customer gets an update. Umm was he interested in a payment arrangement or you never had that conversation right?

Agent: I never had that conversation, he was talking all hyper and he just wanted to repeat umm what was already on the case, umm he keeps thinking that we drafted \$800 out of his account, I ... I don't see that we did that umm. And so he said he wanted to file a formal complaint about uh his rent money for \$800 being drafted out of his account, he repeated there was one faucet and that they umm use one bowl to feed the livestock,

Support Line: Well then you know, as far as what we're showing here there's a lot of cancelled rebills because there was estimated reads.

Agent: Mhm

Support Line: And so when we're dealing with a high water bill issue you know we want to go ahead and identify the high volume adjustment application ... umm obviously we have a case already filed, so I'm going to go ahead and get him to get an update from the CSC's about that. And then of course if the customer's not interested in umm a payment arrangement you know we would need to ask collections to postpone for 30 days while we work this issue out. If the customer's not willing to get on an arrangement. So those are kinda just things you want to think about umm as a solution to calm them down of course. Umm you know hopefully it does work out, but of course he already hung up so I'll go ahead and get back to him and round off the details okay.

Agent: Okay

Support Line: Did you have any other questions?

Agent: I don't ... umm oh okay I guess I do, I'm sorry,

Support Line: Oh

Agent: Okay so in the event that umm in this scenario, that the case the escalation case wasn't umm you know like received by anyone,

Support Line: Addressed ... Addressed

Agent: Okay, umm okay and time has lapsed it the next thing for me to do is reach out to a lead? To get them ...

Support Line: Yeah yeah you contact us, cause were gonna contact those umm those umm those work parties to get an update.

Agent: Okay

Support Line: So yeah you go ahead and go through us about that okay.

Agent: Okay, okay

Support Line: And then the auto pay all of that did draft on the 1ih after the customer called us on the 22 nd, I'm assuming we should have cancelled all that auto pay business. So I'm gonna have to probably listen to a call as well. Yeah let's see, yeah no, he has a maximum of \$100.

Agent: Mhm

Support Line: And

Agent: Mhm and that's ... (unintelligible)

Support Line: Yeah, so we we drafted the maximum because each of those bills were over \$100, like for example: one of em was like \$1,096, so we drafted that one on the fourth, another was \$1,100, \$11,000 we drafted that on the fourth. Yeah the other was just \$9.00 so that that we didn't have to worry about that, \$10, \$8.00 for another. So yeah we did draft all those \$100 across the board because of the

nd
forwarded balance. So he's upset about the draft taking place after he called us on the 22 I'm assuming.

Agent: Mhm

nd

Support Line: Yeah if I go back a little bit let me see here, because it got to Robert Dickson on the 22 I don't know who Robert Dickson is, outbound call, left message. Oh yeah cause the balance is more than \$100. Rosa Bell On the 17th said (unintelligible) Sarah (unintelligible) at AWU gave the okay to bill the account for his irrigation meter. Billed from March 2017 to Oct 2017, that didn't aren't being issued, emailed Sarah to let her know the account has been billed. Part of that is they did a start for his DUF and inquiry on the 22 nd of September, issued a service order to ping read and check what meter feed (unintelligible) this is not a fire hydrant. Per service order the meter is on site to the left of the drive way and the irrigation meter read was obtained. And then they started processing the adjustment because they were just getting system estimates. Randy Ortega did a to do please release uh pending bill as soon as possible, thank you because back then the bill was being estimated and the bills weren't coming out. Then they finally all came out.

Agent: Mhm

Support Line: And then so yeah this is like a high water bill issue, which we have a case for, he's upset about the draft that took place you know. It's gonna have to be the way it's gonna be. Then we have to get him on an arrangement so that you know he doesn't get cut off. But it looks like he had a stopped meter or crossed meter issue. Yeah? So, umm yeah you definitely need to just call the support line for things like this. I'll go ahead and figure out what we need to do with him on the next steps okay.

Agent: Okay, thank you so much.

Support Line: Alright you take care, bye bye

Agent: Bye

Call Transcript

Name of the caller: Paul Saustrup

Name of the agent:

Service Address:

Customer Phone Number:

Date of the call: 12/18/2017

Agent: Good morning. Thank you for call the City of Austin Utilities. My name is Toni. How can I help you?

Caller: I'm sorry, what's your name?

Agent: Toni (spelled name out)

Caller: (Customer spelling name) Ton – then had question on how to spell name

Agent: T like Toni

Caller: Yeah

Agent: O like Oscar. N like Nancy. I like igloo.

Caller: Toni

Agent: Yes

Caller: Hi Toni, this is Paul. Heh, I'm uh, uh, city of Austin water customer only. And I um, read the story in the paper how people are getting these crazy bills and then the next day I got a bill for twelve thousand dollars. So I called, they said they would come back within two days. About two weeks later I called again, um, and...they said they would come back in two days. A couple days later, my rent check bounced and I checked and the City of Austin had drafted eight hundred dollars out of my account without ever contacting me. And then I told them, you know, hey I want to make sure there's no problem, I want to make sure my water doesn't get disconnected, I know this a, you know somebody misread the meter something, I don't even.. I have ah, ah.. anyway so they made two three hundred dollars off. Then ah, now just got a bill in the mail saying I got a six hundred dollar late fee on my twelve hundred, twelve thousand dollar bill. My bill normally is six dollars a month. I have water only for agricultural purposes, to water my wildlife only. I don't have any toilet, I don't have a structure, it is a vacant lot. So..

Agent: Okay

Caller: Ah, I've called a bunch of time you know and no one has ever called me back but then they went behind my back and took eight hundred dollars out of my account that caused me a huge problem.

Agent: Okay, let's take a look at the account, uh so I can get some more information, I can see more details on this. Um, can I verify the service address please?

Caller: Um, I'm looking around for my notes. I'm not finding them right now. You might have to look it up, I think they looked it up by my phone number, um..

Agent: Right I would still have

Caller: I have a notebook with all my notes in it. What did you say?

Agent: I still have to verify like the address. That's the basic information, I have to verify that.

Caller: Okay, well it's really odd because the address is, was assigned to me and they never provided me with the address.

Agent: Okay, do you have a bill?

Caller: That's what I am looking for now.

Agent: Okay.

Caller: Obviously I have a bill. I got a twelve thousand dollar bill. Um, there's got to be a way, um,

Agent: Thank you. And now may I have your first and last name?

Caller: It's Paul Saustrop (then spelled) Saustrop.

Agent: Thank you Mr. Saustrop. For security purposes may I verify the last four digits of your social security number?

Caller: [REDACTED]

Agent: Thank you. The phone number you are calling from is a good phone number for your account?

Caller: Many times again – yes.

Agent: Okay. Can I verify the best mailing address for your bill?

Caller: [REDACTED]

Street, [REDACTED]

Agent: Okay, thank you very much. Okay, so, at this time, let me see here...so you do have active autopay on the account. Um, let me see what your limit is set to. Set to two hundred dollars. Let me see what happened with multiple payments. On December first for one hundred dollars, um..

Caller: Right, and I didn't, I didn't authorize that because, my bill, I had a three hundred dollar credit, my bill is typically six dollars a month. I thought I had a couple years' worth of payments, also and that got sucked up and ya'll are...I want to take the autopay off this ya'll have shown that ya'll are not honorable in your usage of my autopay.

Agent: Okay we termed your autopay as of today. Uh, then we will go ahead, there's an active autopay scheduled to draft, I'll go ahead and cancel that one as well. Uh,

Caller: Yeah

Agent: Obviously I have to do a little bit more research here on the account. I understand the inconvenience but I definitely need to take a look at this hundred dollar payment that is ____ with the draft. One there are multiple bills, which I don't see. Op her we go, here we go, so give me, give me a little bit of time to work on this for you..

Caller: Okay, I'm more than happy to do that, I've been calling, if you look at my, if you look at my file or whatever you should see that I have called several times and expressed extreme concern that my bill went from six dollars to twelve thousand dollars. All I have is a faucet in a field, to fill, to water cows and wildlife. I typically use about a thousand or two thousand gallons a month. Ah I have a two thousand gallon tank that I fill up, and then I don't, then I turn the faucet off and I even uh try and fill the tank half full each month..I use, so, um, I didn't receive a bill a couple of months and I called and said heh I am not receiving a bill and they said that's cool you got three hundred dollars credit. Because this account was very confusing. Um, there is a large track of land like a hundred acres that had water and electric. One of the, they sold part of the track of land that had the electric. I bought another part of the land that had the water. So I had, for months and months I had to pay the water and electric or you wouldn't give me water. So my water bill was like six dollars a month for a bunch of months. And then they got the electric taken off my account and starting billing it to the correct person that now had the water, the electric account and they credited me back three hundred dollars. So I had a three hundred dollar credit and less than ten dollars a month was coming out and everything was cool and I thought I had like thirty months of water use and everything was going to be cool. Then I didn't get a bill for a few months and then all of a sudden I got a twelve thousand dollar bill. So that's where we are at.

Agent: Okay. Okay, uh..

Caller: I called somebody and they said well the tiers were misapplied, you know, because, you, they, they didn't read your meter for eight months and then they applied all this at once. But regardless of how many tiers there are, you know regardless of how many tiers there are, it's an impossibility that I used any amount of water for any amount of money that would be twelve thousand dollars because I don't have a structure, I don't have a toilet, I don't have a anything, it is bare raw land with... with one..

Agent: Have you been monitoring how much water you've been using? Like have you been looking at your meter and verifying the reads?

Caller: No, the meter is like a half mile away in the woods. You know I am at the end of a dead end street. No, no I have, have not.

Agent: Okay. I know just as you are going forward I would recommend, I know that it might be inconvenient to reach, but maybe do it once every three days or something like that um, so that just that you have your records, um, you know, and then just create a log. If there is any extra watering that you do during that day just note you did. Um, I do see an active escalation right now. I know it been since like November twenty second or coming up on a month and you know a couple of people have touched this then and I'm just trying to get a little bit more info on..

Caller: Okay, I want you to stop taking my rent out of my bank account and I want somebody to come out and meet me, read the meter, verify their reading the right meter because the city, I don't believe they know which meter is mine. Ah, I'd like to, I'd like to meet the field representative in field to see what's going on, show them I have on faucet and I need ah,

Agent: I mean even if you have one faucet and there's a leak somewhere, you know between that meter and the faucet that can use more extra water.

Caller: We are not talking extra water we are talking twelve thousand, we're talking twelve thousand.(Agent and caller talking at the same time conversation of agent unintelligible 8:20 to 8:23) I own a, I own a laundrymat and uh I, and I frequently use sixty thousand gallons of water a month, this is in another city. I am very familiar with high water usage and what it takes to pump out a thousand dollars worth of water a month and this was twelve thousand. It would have flooded my whole neighborhood to use the amount of water that they are claiming that I used. There's obviously a big error somewhere. There's not a big wet spot, there's not a leak, there's a giant error somewhere. It's a physically impossibility that I used twelve thousand dollars' worth of water.

Agent: Okay. I, I,

Caller: I would of flooded

Agent: I just trying to research your account. And

Caller: Sure, just think about it..We're also

Agent: I don't know what's...I need to look further, I need to, I understand what you are telling me..

Caller: Can I give you my phone number I been on hold..

Agent: I can't do that, I can't do that, that's something that has been escalated for us. You can wait for the callback from whoever it's been escalated to. Um, or I can try to research your account and see..

Caller: Sure

Agent: if I can I can get any information but that will require some hold time. Do you mind holding for about three to four minutes while I look into your account..

Caller: Not at all I have been holding since November 22.. so I will continue holding.

Agent: I appreciate so much patience thank very much.

Caller: I appreciate it too. You got to understand that I am freaking out when I get, uh ...

Agent: (Cuts in) first couple of words unintelligible ... I would like to find out what's going on so we can get this fixed for you. I really would.

Caller: Sure

Agent: Okay. Thank you very much for your patience.

Agent: Okay. Thank you very much for your patience Mr. Saustrup.

Customer: Sure

Agent: So, I, I, I, see clearly what happened. There was a backbill that we are trying to clarify. Which means that verify backbill on those charges. Now, what, the escalation is still pending right now. What I'm gonna.. first thing I also want you to know this is a livestock meter. This is where, where, you know

livestock purposes it's not technically residential. I would recommend this time out using the commercial services. Uh, I am going to email the commercial supervisor and ask her if she could please escalate, um, the escalation, to see if she can get a call back on that work done established as soon as possible. More than likely been referred to water and that can take a little more time, um, with the escalation, so I am going to see if we can get a little more attention on that. Uh, ..

Caller: Sure

Agent: From here on out I would follow the prompts to the commercial department. Uh,

Caller: Okay

Agent: I would say, uh, I gonna put in a request to have them uh, see if we can like push any collections process on the account for..

Caller: Of course

Agent: for the next thirty days, so that, um, you know they can work on this. Um, I am definitely going to recommend that. Uh see if we can get that placed on the account. Uh, I would say gives us a call back in the next week if you don't hear from somebody, uh, but I would expect that call back within

Caller: Okay thank you very much.

Agent: You're very welcome. Was there anything else?

Caller: No. I appreciate your time and have a great day.

Agent: You too. Thank you very much Mr. Sastrup. Thank you for choosing Austin Utilities.

Call Transcript

Name of the caller: Paul Saustrup

Name of the agent: Mark Johansen

Service Address: [REDACTED]

Customer Phone Number: [REDACTED]

Date of the call: 12/18/2017

Caller: This is Paul can I help you?

Agent: Hi Mr Saustrup, my name is Mark Johansen, I work with Austin Energy city of Austin utilities, I received information from a city council member's or maybe the Mayor's office, yeah the mayor's office, concerning a high water bill you'd received, and you had not heard back from anyone yet?

Caller: No, and I uh, I had called so many times that it finally went to escalation on November 22nd, and to say it's a high water bill is completely um, miss-, I got a \$12,000 on a bill that's normally \$6 a month,

Agent: Yeah, yeah

Caller: and so I'm really disappointed that there's not some kind of system in place that when a customer, typically uses \$6 a month

Agent: Yeah, yeah

Caller: uses 12,000, something's gotta' happen and then they auto-drafted my account the maximum amount luckily I had thought to put a cap on it, they auto-drafted my account eight times back to back, they auto-drafted my account, and then the next day they sent a \$600 late fee, even though I had gone on the record as hey something's wrong here, and ah now they're threatening a bill collector, and uh, I just, that's when I called the mayor

Agent: Yeah

Caller: So, I mean when it went to escalations on November 22nd, the day after I read the story in the newspaper, that a lot of customers were getting exorbitant bills, I thought, you know that there would be some system in place to look into this, but it's just a comedy of errors, and it's just to the point of you know incompetence at this point.

Agent: Yeah, well I want to look into this with you a little bit, and see what I can find out as well, I wanted to give you my direct phone number, um I just got this from the Mayor's office a few minutes ago so I need to do some investigation, now this is from a bill that originally came out in April, is that right? For the, I see for the 759,000 gallons or something like that used?

Caller: Um, I feel like it, I don't even, when did we get the water turned off?

Agent: Oh I see, they did rebilling in November it looks like, ok, why why why? Wow, I do see...

Caller: So we, my wife feels like had the service turned on in April.

Agent: OK, well I'm gonna look into this a little further...

Caller: So so if it was turned on in April, and they backdrafted us for April, for a kagillion gallons, and that was prior to us, it's kind of a convoluted system.

Agent: Well, here your service started in February

Caller: Ok, well ok then, and I have I think I have two half inch water spigots on the property, there's no structure, there's no toilets, there's no wasterwater, it's just 15 acres of bare land, we have this to water the cows, I have like a 2,000 gallon tank, that I fill up with a garden hose, and then I turn off the water

Agent: Yeah

Caller: and then the gravity feed, and I do that because if there's ever a water leak, the most I would lose is the 2,000 gallons in the tank

Agent: Sure

Caller: and we literally turn the water off at the street, but here's the deal that may help you in researching this, if you go back you're gonna see that we've been working with the water department for a long time, because what had happened was, this tract of land had a water and electrical service, on it, at some point, and 50 acres of it was sold off, and that 50 acres contained the electric meter

Agent: Yeah right

Caller: We bought, we bought 15 acres and it had the water meter, we wanted to turn the water on, and they said ok we'll turn the water on but you've got an electrical service too we said no we don't, and they said yeah you do, and if you want your water, you have to pay for your electric too, so I said fine, we'll pay for the electric too, its like 30 bucks a month or something that was running a grinder station next door or something its an apartment complex on the hill, so then um, I said we don't even have an electric pole on the street, so it doesn't make sense, but if that's what it takes then we'll do it, then they came back and they gave us a \$300 credit for the electric bill that we were forced to pay to get the water turned on, and so then my bill was like 6 dollars a month, and I had \$300 credit and everything was just fine, and everything made sense and there was no problem, then um, we didn't get a bill for several months, and I called and said hey well I'm not getting a bill anymore, and they said well hey you have \$300 credit, you're fine don't worry about a thing, I said ok, and then I got a \$12,000 bill and I'm like wooh, and that's where we're at now.

Agent: Right, alright, well I'm gonna, let me give you my direct number, cause this, I don't want you to feel like you're not having anybody to talk to um

Caller: That's great, what's

Agent: I'm gonna look into this

Caller: What's your name again?

Agent: Mark Johansen

Caller: Mark

Agent: Yes, I work in our executive escalations department, so when it comes in through like city hall, mayor's office and stuff, it comes to me, and then I'll look into and see what I can find out about it, my number is

Caller: OK

Agent: [REDACTED]

Caller: [REDACTED]

Agent: [REDACTED]

Caller: [REDACTED]

Agent: [REDACTED]

Caller: [REDACTED], well thanks a lot Mark

Agent: Yeah

Caller: Appreciate any light you could shed on it, there an apartment complex up the street has the electric service, maybe somehow they, the water bill for the electric for the apartment complex got mixed up with mine or whatever, but...

Agent: Well, they did a crossed meter, they did a crossed meter here and they said that there was no crossed meters, but I would like you to do, unless you already know it, if you would, you know where your water meter is located correct?

Caller: Yes

Agent: I'd like for to get the, well I could send somebody out to get it

Caller: I've got it

Agent: Do you have the number, the meter number?

Agent: Thanks Mr Saustrup, we'll talk to you soon.

Caller: Really appreciate your help, happy to pay but it did kind of hurt my feelings that they auto-drafted 800 bucks out of my account, that could have been somebody rent money, you know, you could have really jacked me on that.

Agent: Yeah, You know what, um I'm looking at that right now, so they've already stopped it as of today, it's not gonna be autodrafting anything else anymore, so....

Caller: Yeah I saw, they had em, I called and had em do that because I

Agent: Yeah

Caller: I lost my faith and trust in the system that would not, bill me for a couple of months and then bill me \$12,000 and then, and then raid my bank at night for the maximum amount they could get after taking a month so not call me back. So thanks for all your help.

Agent: No problem no problem, I'll talk to you soon.

Caller: Thanks man, bye

Agent: Uh huh, bye bye.

Call Transcript

Name of the caller: Paul Sastrup

Name of the agent: Mark Johansen

Service Address: [REDACTED]

Customer Phone Number: [REDACTED]

Date of the call: 12/19/2017

Caller: This Paul can I help you

Agent: Hi Mr. Sastrup, this is Mark again with Austin Energy. How are you?

Caller: Hey Mark I'm great, Thank you

Agent: good, good, Hey the Only thing I'm doing is I, I, have an investigator working on it this, but it might take a few days, but I'm going to get back before the end of the week: so we'll get this resolved and figure out what's going on. I just wanted to let you know, if you didn't hear from me, til-uh, for a couple of days, I had not forgotten about you at all, Okay.

Caller: Okay, cool and last night my wife and I went through all our bills

Agent: Yeah

Caller: um, we saw there was a spot were our um. I think it's going to be, turn out to be a matter of a simple miss-meter reading. Um, because are meter. I don't know if they started out at zero, but it was very low, but our meter reading use to say five-nifty-eight, five started be at five-nifty-six to five-nifty-eight to... and we would be six dollars and

Agent: Right, right

Caller: and two of usage: two thousand gallons that went on for a long time. And our number was like around...was... then, the highest number we saw was like fifteen hundred...on, fifteen hundred to fifteen-o-two meter reading and we got six dollar bill that month. Everything was normal. Then we saw months where the meter reading went from fifteen hundred to... you know, to a dramatically different one. And it was this seven hundred ninety five thousand different and I think what they did is they start, they were reading one meter for a couple of months and they were started reading a different meter. That's going to be my...

Agent: Well that's what we need to be looking at because; I know what you mean about the reads for a long time, for months and months the read on your meter was eight-thirty-eight. When that happens usually it's an indication of a stopped meter, but right now I need them to verify, double check the addressing, the meter numbers and then the actual reads

Caller: Yeah

Agent; And so, we're going to work on that part, but everything you just said is exactly in line with what I'm thinking as well. I just need verification so we can see what's what. Along with that to Mr. Sastrup, I did remove that 600 and some odd dollar late fee to. And we're not going to get any more of that racked up either. What's going to happen is, um. Well let's just see what's figured out and if there's any re-billing going on

Caller: Yeah

Agent: But I'm going to make sure that you stay out of, um... any kind of collections or issues with your service being turned off. Okay?

Caller Yeah, Great man cuz I, It's going to turn out to be a real simple thing... and um

Agent: I hope, I hope (laughter)

Caller: You got the address that I gave you on Slaughter where our address would the...would our water service be connected with another electrical service owned by somebody else? Um.

Call Transcript

Name of the caller: Paul Sastrup

Name of the agent: Mark

Service Address:

Customer Phone Number:

Date of the call: 1/3/2018

Caller: Hello, this is Paul. Can I help you?

Agent: Hi, Mr. Sastrup. This is Mark with Austin Energy calling you back, again.

Caller: Yes, sir.

Agent: I am back from my time off. Um, yesterday when I was back, I checked in to see if they had any updates yet or if they, uh, finished their investigation. And, I did resupply them that information you gave me before I left about, uh, the different names of the streets and also that you put your name on your meter. So, uh, they have been looking at that. However, I, when I checked in today, they told me they they had not completed that yet. And they're still working on it. I am-

Caller: Yeah.

Agent: Monitoring your account and you're not in any danger of being cut off or anything. So, I just wanted to call you and give you an update.

Caller: Yeah. And does my daily usage look like it-. I mean for a year we had a \$6.00 a month bill, which makes sense that, cause once every 3 months we fill this 2,000 gallon tank.

Agent: Yeah.

Caller And I, and it was, and it's been super low for all these months. And then this 12,000. And I think they just read the wrong meter, one time.

Agent: Yeah. I'm certainly looking into that. You know there were several months where there was no usage recorded on your billing at all. So, that's one thing we're looking at as well. Because it was a stopped meter, where you were getting charged the customer charges, but not for any water usage at all. Cause your meter was stopped. So, that's what they're... OK, so just a minute. So, uh, but before I speak on things that I'm not sure of until they finish that investigation, then I, I really can't say for sure.

Caller: Sure. And we'll never know for sure.

Agent: So, so- Yeah, maybe not. So, at any rate though-

Caller: Yeah.

Agent: I just wanted to let you know that, um we're still investigating and I-

Caller: Alright.

Agent: Should be able to call you in the next couple of days with an update. OK?

Caller: Sounds great.

Agent: Alright. Thanks, Mr. Sastrup. Have a good day.

Caller: Thank you.

Call Transcript

Name of the caller: Paul Saustrup

Name of the agent: Mark

Service Address: [REDACTED]

Customer Phone Number: [REDACTED]

Date of the call: 01/22/2018

Caller: Hello, this Paul, can I help you?Hello...

Agent: I'm sorry, can you hear me now?

Caller: I can hear you now.

Agent: Okay, sorry about that. Mr. Saustrup, this is Mark at Austin Energy and I first of all wanted to apologize for this taking so long. I've been sending and resending people out there to, to make sure that we are looking at the right meters, and, and make sure billing is, whatever is going on. So (silence)

Caller: Uh oh. now). Okay now I can hear you again.

Agent: Okay, Okay. So, so they went out there, they've been out there a few times to verify that the meters your're location is correct and the information that you've provided is very helpful. So, uh..

Caller: Yes, because I see them, they keep going to my front gate which is my neighbor's meter. I that meter disturbed. So I know that they went to the wrong place several, several times.

Agent: Yeah, yeah. And, and, so here's what I'm gonna suggest. They've, they've reallocated the amount of water used and divided it up over several months, since when you first started service, and they did that because it will help lower your bill a little bit but not very much. What I find extremely, um, curious is that since September and October your water usage is way down. So you are gonna get these bills in the mail maybe today if you didn't already get them yesterday. This shows you your new balance amount and it shows the water that has been applied and it's applied per, um, city code. What happens is, is that, if we have an actual beginning read and end read then it's divided up over that time period.

Caller: Uh.

Agent: So, it', it's still high and the, the bill is still almost eleven thousand dollars, however on this end, there is no more to dispute because we know we have the right meter and we know that the reads, they may not be, we know the beginning read and the ending read and it's all been applied to you. My suggestion, that the next step for, for dispute, is to request an administrative hearing. And with that you would go in front of a, uh, independent, um, facilitator.

Caller: What does that mean?

Agent: Well, the city is going to show what they used apply the bill. But what you would show that you only

Caller: I'm listening. The city doesn't know which meters are reading, what day of the week they reading and even when I guide them in they still read the wrong meter five times so I don't know, that's completely, we went through so much trouble to get our water turned on. There's no way, I have a single faucet in a field feeding a water trough with neighbors within eye sight. There's no way

Agent: Yeah

Caller: that twelve thousand dollars of water went through that meter. So, unless you want me to vocally

Agent: Yes

Caller: expose this, this is not going to be pretty either. I am not going to sit still for a eleven thousand water bill coming out

Agent: Oh sure. That's why I want to..

Caller: a structure that doesn't have a sewer or a structure on it.

Agent: Yeah

Caller: This is a faucet in a field feeding livestock. If water was going anywhere, we would of, that's water that would fill like six Olympic pools.

Agent: Okay, so you have a pencil and paper? I'm going to give you

Caller: I do, I do. What's your last name Mark?

Agent: It's Johansen (then spelled it for caller)

Caller: What's your direct phone number?

Agent: [REDACTED]

Caller: Another thing that has been troubling is you've done a great job of leaving messages for me but whenever I would have feedback there was never any way of me to contact you so that was a little frustrating so

Agent: I'm sorry about that

Caller: Could your number... no I am just sharing with you. If you ever need to talk to a citizen that might be under a lot of stress it would be helpful if you leave a phone number for them to call back. Cause I ...Even though you've done a great job of communicating. When you didn't leave a phone number to call back, and I didn't write it down the first time you called, thinking this was going to be a simple matter..

Agent: I understand

Caller: I still never met with anybody, I still never met with anybody to come out there to see even if they were reading the right meter. That I seriously have my doubts and I really think you were making a giant simple error that I got your 512 what?

Agent: [REDACTED] Now what's important is that you're gonna request a administrative hearing at a email address in writing. The email address is aehearings@austinenergy.com. In your email request for a hearing you're going to simple say, uh, called, they reallocated my water usage, I dispute the findings and want to escalate to the next level. And then, what will happen, is that will get turned over to Austin Water Utility. We do their billing for them, so we're looking at the reads there and also the billings according to those reads. But they are gonna be able to get more in dept as to the meter itself. And so..

Caller: At some point is there ever a dude in a truck that is willing to over and let me point at my meter? If he could be the one to ..(agent began to speak)

Agent: I, so, I don't have that authority or ability to do but once you've applied for the hearing water may very well reach out to you at which time you could make that request.

Caller: Okay, so for a bunch of years, my water meters, I used six dollars a month and now I use six dollars a month in water approximately, that's the last bill I got was six dollars. But...

Agent: And that's .. You know what, I think that's gonna be one of your, your biggest points to make is that since this time of the water meter corrections or whatever your usage is way down. So I mean I want you to...

Caller: Way down before and way down afterwards except for that one bill for twelve thousand dollars.

Agent: Yeah, yeah. So, so that's, all things I would, I would suggest writing down a timeline.. so what happens is once you request the administrative hearing, they will send it over to water. Once they have evaluated that, they may call you and contact you and resolve it. Just water utility to customer. If not though, then they will supply you with dates of available, times available. And then what I am suggesting you do, is just make a time chronological list of events as they've happened. So that you can present that side. Cause, ah, theres the only thing, the one thing that I can't deny is that the usage has come way down.

Caller: No I guess, another way to say that is its returned to where its always been.

Agent: That's true.

Caller: You, you understand that it came down form twelve thousand? Well of course it came down from twelve thousand. I twenty four thousand. But

Agent: I got

Caller: What.. I've got a year's worth of bills here and it's consistently right around six dollars

Agent: Yeah

Caller: and its twelve thousand, then its six dollars.

Agent: Well on the one's that's six dollars, I want you to look at that and see if there is any consumption showing on that bill..

Caller: Yes

Agent: cause the bill charges for the, for the ah, the customer charges and stuff but if the beginning read and the ending read is the same which it, it appears to me in looking at the bills that it is. Then, that means they weren't charging you for any usage and that, that's where it, ah, a lot of this issue comes up, it that there is no consumption billed for. So, but look at that on the bills. But request the Administrative Hearing and then just put together your timeline and stuff and, and, what will happen is if you are give, given the hearing their going supply you with a packet which is, um, it will be like several days before the hearing. So it will have everything that they've put together to show how there are coming up with this. And then, but, but, the simple part of this is, is that before and after your usage was way low and then the big key thing is the confusion of the meters and so forth. Um, so I can't tell you any more than that, but that would be my next steps because I just don't have the ability to go in and say yes to, this makes sense, I'm gonna change all this. I have to concrete..

Caller: Sure.

Agent: showing of, of read that was input incorrectly or whatever. So, and I don't have that ability here. But the administrative process would have the ability to make that call.

Caller: But you feel like you have you have a solid start date reading from since the bill, the bill has put in my name. Because we bought the property about a year ago. Casue the year, almost a year to get the water turned on. So we had the water in our, since the time we've had the water in our name you feel like you got a correct reading and that reading is a lot bigger now.

Agent: Well, here's what I am going to tell you that I do have. Is that when you started services last February..

Caller: Okay

Agent: we went and installed a new meter in there on the twenty first. So that new meter, no I'm sorry that was an electric meter, my bad, hold on. Let me see what it says about the water here.....Okay so for water meter. Okay, we turned it on the twenty third. Yeah they had a read on here um, weather they were looking at the correct meter, I don't have that information. They may have, they may have that when you create (?), that would be my, uh, approach, is when you are requesting the hearing were they looking at the right meter?

Caller: Right, but... But I don't understand why you can't, March of last year..

Agent: Yeah. In March of last year that was a read that came that says 79 gallons of usage.

Caller: Well I won a laundrymat..and that's more than I use at a laundrymat.

Agent: Yeah.

Caller: So, I know, I know that can't be right. Because..

Agent: Okay

Caller: I'm done here working on my laundmat right now in south Texas and we used 66 thousand dollars, 66 thousand gallons..

Agent: Thousand gallons

Caller: of water

Agent: Yeah

Caller: 66 thousand gallons of water at a laundrymat. So I know that I did not use 79 thousand watering my cows.

Agent: And, sir, I'm not disagreeing with you. I'm just saying that I don't, from the evidence that I have, I don't have enough to make that change myself. You would have to go through the administrative

hearing process where they could make that determination, the officer. And their very, very fair. I have dealt with hearings before. I think we have one of the best hearing processes..that I've seen, especially for the custome side..

Caller: Is the citizen with two kids and several jobs and I'm trying to make ends meet. I just don't have time for the kind of a process when there's.. when

Agent: Well I think that once they give you the information for the hearing. One of your options would be for, ah, a phone hearing as well. But, please, I, I don't have any other other options available, I just can't

Caller: Alright

Agent: change the billing on it. That's the only path left to take. But I am suggesting that you take it because, ah..

Caller: And you're with the City of Austin?

Agent: Yes. I am with Austin Energy. We do the billing for water but I am with the city – yes.

Caller: You are with Austin Energy?

Agent: Uh Uh.

Caller: Okay. Alright, well heh, I appreciate your help and I wish they would streamline your operations. Ah..

Agent: I, I understand. You know if you get questions along the way about the hearing process or whatever, you have my number, give me a call, I'll answer it in the best that I can.

Caller: Sure

Agent: The hard part for me here, is that I understand that we have the meter issue. I can't go out there myself so everything is just waiting on others to report back, which can be time consuming. Once this gets requested for a hearing, ah, the water department they send their own people out. So that's a little different, they can, they can look at this and maybe just make a determination on what they find. But..

Caller: Okay

Agent: I unfortunately don't have enough information to make that change here.

Caller: Okay. Thanks a lot.

Agent: Okay

Caller: Okay

Agnet: Sure Mr. Saustrop. Have a good day.

Caller: You too.