

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JPS and NWC fail to Meet Standards to Notify Customers of Planned Outages

(KINGSTON, Jamaica; 2019 January 17): The major water and energy service providers are failing to meet standards for notifying their customers of planned service disruptions.

As part of their agreed Quality of Service Standards, the Jamaica Public Service Company Limited (JPS) and the National Water Commission (NWC) are required to submit reports to the Office of Utilities Regulation (OUR) on their performance. One such report relates to their performance in notifying customers within a specified timeline about planned outages.

The compliance results are contained in the OUR's latest Quarterly Performance Report (QPR) for the 2018 July – September period which is available on the OUR's website.

One of JPS's Overall Standards requires it to notify customers at least 48 hours (2 days) ahead of planned outages. For the 2018 July – September period, JPS reported a 47.7% compliance rating in meeting this standard, way below the agreed 100% compliance target. This is a 6.1 percentage points decline over the preceding period. JPS advised that it is yet to implement measures to ensure that its compliance rating improves.

The NWC performance targets stipulate that it must maintain a 98% compliance target for providing 12 hours' notice for planned service interruptions lasting **no more** than 4 hours. Where a planned interruption is expected to be for **more than** four hours, the NWC is required to give an advanced notice of at least 24 hours, at a 90% compliance rate.

Based on the information provided by the NWC, it attained an 81% compliance rating with the standard to provide at least 24 hours' advance notice prior to disruptions lasting more than 4 hours. No data was received for any notification to customers for planned service interruptions lasting less than 4 hours.

The OUR has written to the JPS and NWC requesting that they provide information on the reasons for their inability to meet the agreed targets, and measures being put in place to ensure future compliance. Both entities have been asked to respond to the OUR by 2019 January 25.

Other information in the QPR also revealed that the utility customers benefitted from payouts of over \$37M for breaches of the Guaranteed Standards as well as credits and compensation secured for them by the OUR's Consumer Affairs Unit (CAU).

The JPS compliance report on its Guaranteed Standards' performance indicated that 17,634 breaches were committed, representing a 3% decline compared to the preceding quarter. These breaches attracted compensation of \$34.95 million, which was made through automatic compensation.

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Similar to the preceding period, the standard with the highest incidence of breaches related to estimated bills, which restricts JPS from sending more than two consecutive estimates without a penalty.

The NWC's compliance report on the Guaranteed Standards scheme showed there were 550 breaches representing a 13% decrease over the last quarter. These breaches had a potential pay-out of \$1.75 million while actual payments amounted to \$1.16 million (representing 66% of total potential payments) which were made by way of automatic credits to the affected accounts. The remaining 34% of potential payments represented those breaches for which the required claim forms were not submitted for validation.

The standards with the highest incidence of breaches for the NWC were 'Meter Repair/Replacement', which requires that meter repairs or replacements must be completed within 20 working days after a defect is identified or reported, and 'Access', which requires that new service connections are made within 10 working days of payment.

Through the intervention of the OUR's Consumer Affairs Unit (CAU), \$999,261.01 in compensation payment was secured for utility customers. Of this, NWC accounted for 8% while JPS and Columbus Communications (Flow) registered 85% and 6% respectively. The remaining 1% was attributable to C&WJ and Digicel.

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