

Contract called 'ambiguous'

# Cable company gets complaints

By Dan Coran  
Of the Emerald

Several residents of the Eugene area have lodged complaints against Group W Cable after experiencing difficulties getting the local cable company to pick up issued equipment once they discontinued the service.

Sharon Owens of the Eugene Consumer Sounding Board, a self-help legal organization, said the contract signed by consumers subscribing to the cable service does not clarify how the company wants its converter units returned once service is terminated.

She said the CSB has received complaints by subscribers who have been fined by the cable company despite arrangements they made to have the company pick up converter units.

One such Eugene resident, who asked not to be identified, claims she called the company and told them to pick up her converter unit when she disconnected her service on Nov. 4. Although she did not make a specific appointment for the representative to come by, she said the company did not pick up the unit until March 12 when she threatened to leave it outside her door.

Soon thereafter, she received a bill for \$259, because the unit was not made available at the time of or within five days after the disconnection of service, as called for in her terms and conditions contract.

"Every time I started to get somewhere with these people, I ran into a brick wall," she said. "I did make it available to them, over and over again."

When her case was heard in small claims court on Oct. 28, her fine was annulled and her filing fees were refunded.

Owen said the CSB has received about six calls from people who have had problems having their converter units picked up. The board is presently referring complaints to the state attorney general's office, which has recently opened three files concerning the matter.

The portion of the contract that asks subscribers to make their converters available to the company is ambiguous, Owen said. She added that if the company wants converter units to be returned by the patrons, it

Group W Cable, and its collection agency, Account Collection Bureau, Inc., of Springfield, refused to give information concerning specific subscribers and their account records.

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should specify that in the contract.

"There have been people damaged by the way the wording is now," she said. "If they don't change it, more people could be damaged by it in the future."

Brian Sullivan, general manager of Group W Cable, in Eugene, said his company would never intentionally fine a customer who attempted to promptly return a converter unit.

"Our procedure is set up to fulfill our policy of retrieving converter units and returning them to service," Sullivan said. "We will pick up a converter if an appointment is made. It's nonsensical that we would ignore a request to pick up a converter."

"A high percentage of people return converter units in a timely fashion," he added. "A subscriber might drop the unit by our office if it's more convenient for them, but we wouldn't insist on the customer doing this."

Another Eugene resident, however, claims the company never showed up for an appointment to retrieve her converter unit. Tamara Winters said a worker came to pick up her unit only after she threatened to leave the it in her mailbox. Shortly afterward she says she received a bill for \$289.

"We don't understand it," she said. "I don't know what we'll do at this point."



Photo by Robert Hare

Several Eugene residents claim Group W Cable is fining them for not returning converter units that they asked the company to pick up at their homes.

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