

Rules may hurt utility consumers

PORTLAND (AP) — Representatives of the Oregon Citizens Utility Board say proposed new rules for utility deposits would hurt low-income consumers.

Kathy Weaver, a board member, said Monday that new rules proposed by the Oregon Public Utility Commission are "unnecessarily harsh and punitive and appear to be designed to target and further punish the poor."

Under the rules, utilities could charge new customers deposits equivalent to a two-month bill before granting service if a customer has had any utility service cut off in the previous four years.

"If adopted, this provision would penalize a customer by allowing a gas or electric utility to charge up to a two-month deposit because a customer was too poor to continue telephone service four years ago and was shut off," Weaver said at a news conference.

Instead, she said, deposits should not exceed an average one-month bill and should be charged only to customers whose service had been shut off within the last 12 months and who had not paid the debt or signed a time-payment agree-

ment within 60 days after the shut-off.

John Clay, consumer services administrator for the Public Utility Commission, denied that the proposed rules were aimed at any particular income group.

Utilities already can charge two-month deposits in some cases, Clay said.

The major change in the rules would allow the companies to charge the deposits to customers whose service had been shut off by other companies.

"We feel a person's credit history with any utility company carries over," Clay said.

Weaver said the new rules proposed by the Public Utility Commission staff reflected the desires of utility companies rather than of consumers.

Clay said the proposals attempted to strike a balance between utilities and consumers.

When some people do not pay their bills, eventually the cost is passed to other ratepayers, he said.

The Public Utility Commission has scheduled two hearings this week on the proposed rule changes.

SAIF system reforms may eliminate losses by 1990

SALEM (AP) — The State Accident Insurance Fund Corp. has sharply reduced its losses this year and could eliminate them by the end of 1990, the president of the workers' compensation insurer said Tuesday.

Stan Long said the public corporation held its losses to \$15 million for the first nine months of 1989 and probably will end the year with losses of \$20 million to \$30 million.

SAIF lost \$50 million in 1988, and officials at one time projected losses would exceed \$60 million this year.

Long said at a news conference that internal reorganization, successful programs to reduce claim costs and effects of laws passed in 1987 decreased the losses.

"Hopefully by the end of next year we will stem the

tide of losses," Long said. But he said that would be only a partial victory because Oregon's workers' compensation system remains way too expensive.

"We're swimming upstream against a very strong current of rising costs," he said. Long said the Legislature and state regulators need to take steps to overhaul and reform the system.

He said SAIF has cut its losses by tighter claims review that results in more doubtful claims being denied and by an aggressive campaign against fraud.

The company also has saved \$1 million in six months, he said, with a program that aids injured workers to return to less demanding jobs rather than staying home while injuries heal.

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sues, he said.

"The project is first-hand urban design that is hard to get in Eugene," said Tom Kittle, a student in the Portland studio. "We're getting a lot here that isn't available in Eugene."

This term's project is the beginning of the first year-round Portland studio. In the past, the program has been offered either fall or spring term.

In early August, *Willamette*

Week ran a news brief accusing the University of trying to prevent Portland State from opening its own accredited architecture program by establishing a year-round studio.

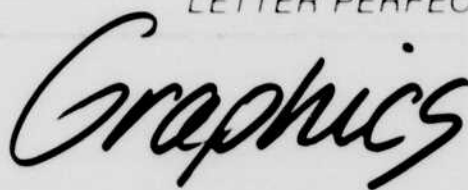
Although the paper later ran a correction, Corner said the University has offered a Portland studio sporadically over the last 16 years. Until now, costs and coordinating problems have blocked plans for a permanent studio.

Last spring, the program received local publicity for a study funded by the National Endowment for the Arts called "Twenty-first Century Production District."

The students in the project studied the east side of the Willamette River and made plans for redeveloping the area, which is currently part of the freeway. The study became part of a city-wide debate over relocating the freeway.

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