

MARYLAND

Retail energy supplier SunSea Energy fined for deceiving 1,200 Maryland customers

By ALEX MANN

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The Maryland Public Service Commission last week levied a \$400,000 fine against a retail energy supplier for duping 1,200 customers in Maryland, the state's Office of the People's Counsel announced Thursday.

The company, SunSea Energy LLC, will still be allowed to operate in the state.

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Employing deceptive sales tactics, SunSea enrolled some 1,200 people in Maryland, raising prices on those customers while it promised savings, according

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The company's practices were exposed after it sought to enroll an employee of the people's counsel over the phone, according to the office. The representative for SunSea, the office said, pretended to be calling from the employee's utility company.

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SunSea promised substantial savings, but it charged about 13 cents per kilowatt-hour rather than the standard rate of 8 cents, the office said.

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The people's counsel said it asked the utility and transportation commission to impose a \$1.5 million fine against SunSea and to revoke its license to sell in Maryland.

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In a statement, People’s Counsel David S. Lapp said the penalty vindicates his office’s civil complaint.

“But it falls short of the penalty we think the Commission should have ordered,” Lapp continued. “And, unfortunately, the company will continue to operate in Maryland even though it engaged in numerous violations over the short time it has operated in Maryland.”

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The people’s counsel presented its case to the commission Oct. 7, 2020, showing “evidence of SunSea’s extensive violations of consumer protection laws and regulations,” the office said.

According to a subsequent news release from the Public Service Commission, the company erred when it enrolled customers over the phone without providing written contracts and engaged in deceptive marketing.

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A representative for SunSea Energy could not be reached for comment Thursday night. The company also operates in New Jersey, Washington, D.C., and Ohio, according to the Public Service Commission.

After the October hearing, the commission mandated SunSea disenroll its Maryland customers and issue partial refunds to them. The commission also ordered the company to stop soliciting new customers.

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At the time, the People's Counsel asked for a \$2.5 million fine. But the commission delayed issuing a civil penalty until last week, according to the consumer advocacy agency.

The People's Counsel acknowledged that SunSea complied with commission's orders in the interim, including issuing refunds.

But Lapp said his agency was disappointed by the commission's penalty.

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