December 22, 2000

ADVICE 1509-E
(U 338-E)

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA
ENERGY DIVISION

SUBJECT: Closure of Twentynine Palms Local Business Office

PURPOSE

In compliance with Decision No. 98-07-077 (D.98-07-077), and Decision No. 99-12-035 (D.99-12-035) Southern California Edison Company (SCE) hereby informs the California Public Utilities Commission (Commission) that it plans to close the Twentynine Palms Local Office located at 6385 Adobe Road, Twentynine Palms CA, effective February 23, 2001.

BACKGROUND

Office Description

The Twentynine Palms Local Business Office is located at the end of the commercial area of Twentynine Palms California.

The local business office conducts business on Monday, Wednesday and Friday of each week for 6 hours each day, or a total of 18 hours a week. The office is closed during the lunch hour. The office is staffed by a single SCE employee, who works in SCE’s Yucca Valley Local Office the other two days a week.

The Twentynine Palms Local Business Office is a stand-alone office and the only local business office in SCE’s service territory in which a service center is not located on the same premises. The office is located in a 4,890 sq. ft. commercial building owned by SCE and currently occupies 29 percent of the available space in the building. The other 71 percent is unused vacant space.
The City of Twentynine Palms is very rural and has a core population of retirees, military enlisted personnel, and persons with low-income levels. The primary commercial activity is service-oriented with no industrial activity due to lack of a sewer and water treatment infrastructure.

Basis For Closure of Office

SCE decided to close the Twentynine Palms Local Business Office because there are currently three Authorized Payment Agencies (APA) in the immediate area that offer identical services with longer hours of operation and greater convenience for our customers. As a result, there has been a decrease in activity at the local business office since the addition of the third APA. This reduced activity has led to SCE incurring the unnecessary expenses of running a stand-alone office when existing APAs offer an expanded level of services.

SCE does not anticipate that the office will be left vacant or abandoned for any length of time after the closure. A real estate study is currently being conducted by SCE’s Real Properties Department to determine how the building may be reused after the office is closed. Currently, SCE plans to either sell or lease the property or donate it to the City of Twentynine Palms. A final disposition will be determined once the property evaluation is completed.

There will be no employee impact resulting from the closure of the local office. The single employee who now works in the local office will be reassigned to a vacant position within the Yucca Valley Local Business Office and the Service Center.

Procedures for Office Closures by SCE

In D.98-07-077, Ordering Paragraph No. 4, pages 14-15, the Commission directed SCE to submit an advice letter no less than 60 days prior to the date it plans to close a business office. The advice letter is to describe the customer notice SCE provided regarding the closure; the service alternatives available to local customers; and the response received from customers and local officials following its notice. The Commission also required SCE to follow the following procedures:

a. Notices or proposed office closures must be provided by mail, posting and published notices. Notice must be given 60 days prior to an advice letter filing notifying the Commission of a planned closure. Multilingual notification must be made and should include prominent statements regarding office closure and the Commission’s 800-telephone number.

b. SCE should compile responses and include them with the advice letter filing with the Commission.
c. Advice letters must give a 60-day notice of proposed closure and must contain accurate listing of APA locations to serve areas formerly served by the business office.

d. Advice letters must demonstrate a rational basis for the closure and no discriminatory impact of closure upon poor, elderly, minority, or rural customers.

As demonstrated below, SCE has followed the procedures established by the Commission.

Date of Closure

SCE plans to close the Twentynine Palms Local Office on February 23, 2001. This is more than 60 days beyond the date of the filing of this advice letter.

Notice Regarding Closure

SCE provided notice to customers of the office closure by mail, posting, and publication as required by D.98-07-077. All of these notices were given more than 60 days prior to this advice letter filing. The posted and mailed notices were multilingual and included prominent statements regarding office closure and the Commission’s 800-telephone number.

A notice was posted at the local office beginning on March 15, 2000, stating that a change in business hours was to become effective May 1, 2000. At that time, the office hours were reduced to 18 hours a week. SCE received no concerns or complaints regarding the reduction of office hours.

On October 23, 2000, a notice was posted in both English and Spanish explaining that the local business office would close permanently on February 23, 2001. Locations and directions for the three APAs serving the area were also provided. A copy of the notice is attached. Beginning on October 23, 2000, letters in English and Spanish were also sent to all customers who visited the local office and conducted a transaction there within the 90 days prior to the mailing of the letter. A copy of the letter is attached. Beginning on October 23, 2000, notice was also published in the Hi Desert Star in Yucca Valley and the Desert Trial in Twentynine Palms, which are the local newspapers, for a six week period. In addition, SCE employees attended City Council meetings and advised the Council the office will be closed. Jim Hart, the City Manager for Twentynine Palms, provided SCE with the City’s support for the closing of the office through a letter to Larry Pena, of SCE, on December 13, 2000. A copy of the letter is attached.
None of the notices, literature, or advertising produced any serious complaints or concerns by customers or local officials. For the months of October and November, SCE received approximately 20 comments from customers who expressed some level of concern about the proposed local office closure. During this same timeframe, SCE had 1,366 transactions in the Twentynine Palms Local Business Office. These 20 customer comments represent only two-tenths of one percent (.2%) of the total customers who visited the office. A summary sheet of the comments is attached along with the monthly cashier summary showing the decline in the number of orders taken. SCE notes even though some customers expressed reservation to the office closure, these customers will not be negatively impacted because all transactions handled at the Local Business Office can be completed at the APAs.

Available Service Alternatives

Customers have three convenient APAs in the Twentynine Palms area where they can make payments and conduct other business. These APAs are at the following locations:

Desert Ranch Market
73544 29 Palms Hwy
Twentynine Palms
Hours: 7:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.
Monday through Sunday

Plaza Market
5668 Historic Plaza
Twentynine Palms
Hours: 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Monday through Sunday

Gateway Pawn Shop
56097 29 Palms Hwy
Yucca Valley
Hours: 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Monday through Friday
Saturday 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

The APAs are open 10 to 12 hours a day, including weekends, and are accessible to public transportation. Two of the APAs are located within one half mile of the existing local office, in the heart of the commercial area district, and offer full service payment centers for all local utilities. All the APAs have access for disabled persons and ring down phones that directly connect customers with SCE’s Customer Communication Center (CCC) if further assistance is needed. Bilingual employees are often employed at the APAs.
The APAs in the Twentynine Palms area will provide our customers an expanded level of service because these agencies, in addition to accepting all payments, including reconnection charges, have more business hours than the Twentynine Palms Local Office and are open on weekends. The additional hours provide customers the opportunity to pay bills and reconnect charges after work. Other services such as billing inquiries, which would normally be handled in a local business office, can also be handled in the APAs by the use of the ring down phones SCE has installed in each location. In addition to the expanded services offered by the three APAs, all of the customers in the Twentynine Palms area have access to SCE's Customer Communications Center seven (7) days a week 24 hours a day to handle transactions that would have been handled in the local business office. The Pending Office Closure Notice was posted October 23, 2000. From September to November 2000, there has been a 42 percent decrease in the number of payments made each month in the local office and also a 40 percent decrease in the number of other service orders generated in the same office. The actual numbers in each category are on the attached “Monthly Cashier Summary.”

Responses by Customer and Local Officials

SCE has received no complaints or concerns into its CCC from any customer regarding the proposed office closure. Some customers visiting the office have commented on the pending closure. The comments of these customers are recorded on the attached “Complaint Record.” Many customers have actually expressed a preference in paying at one of the local APAs because of the conveniences and additional services offered, including check cashing, money orders, and longer business hours, and because the APAs cater specifically to the community. SCE also informed local officials of the proposed office closure and has received a letter from the City Manager supporting SCE in the office closure. Those officials have no objection to the closure of the Twentynine Palms Local Office. SCE notified the Office of Ratepayer Advocates of its intention to submit this advice letter.

Rational Basis for Closure

SCE’s basis for its decision to close the Twentynine Palms Local Business Office is discussed on page 2 of this advice letter.

No Discriminatory Impact Will Result from the Closure

The closure of this local business office will not have a discriminatory impact on rural, elderly, or low income customers in the Twentynine Palms area. As discussed above, SCE has received only a small number of complaints from customers in the area regarding the future closure of the office. All customers, including poor, elderly, minority and rural customers will be able to pay their bills and have their service issues addressed at the three APAs located throughout
Twentynine Palms and have access to SCE’s Customer Communication Center. Further, the City itself agrees that no discriminatory impact to these groups will result from the office closure.

No cost information is required for this advice filing.

This advice filing will not increase any rate or charge, cause the withdrawal of service, or conflict with any other schedule or rule.

**EFFECTIVE DATE**

This advice letter shall become effective on February 22, 2001.

**NOTICE**

Anyone wishing to protest this advice filing may do so by letter via U.S. Mail, facsimile, or electronically, any of which must be received no later than 20 days after the date of this advice filing. Protests should be mailed to:

IMC Program Manager  
Energy Division  
California Public Utilities Commission  
505 Van Ness Avenue, Room 4002  
San Francisco, California 94102  
Facsimile: (415) 703-2200  
E-mail: jjr@cpuc.ca.gov

Copies should also be mailed to the attention of the Director, Energy Division, Room 4004 (same address above).

In addition, protests and all other correspondence regarding this advice letter should also be sent by letter and transmitted via facsimile or electronically to the attention of:

Donald A. Fellows  
Manager of Revenue and Tariffs  
Southern California Edison Company  
2244 Walnut Grove Avenue, Rm. 303  
Rosemead, California 91770  
Facsimile: (626) 302-4829  
E-mail: fellowda@sce.com
There are no restrictions on who may file a protest, but the protest shall set forth specifically the grounds upon which it is based and shall be submitted expeditiously.

In accordance with Section III, Paragraph G, of General Order No. 96-A, SCE is mailing copies of this advice filing to the interested parties shown on the attached service list. Address change requests to the attached GO 96-A Service List should be directed to Emelyn Lawler at (626) 302-3985 (Emelyn.Lawler@sce.com).

Further, in accordance with Public Utilities Code Section 491, notice to the public is hereby given by filing and keeping the advice filing open for public inspection at SCE's corporate headquarters.

For questions, please contact Pat Aldridge @ (626) 302-4617 or Pat.Aldridge@sce.com.

Southern California Edison Company

Donald A. Fellows, Jr.

DAF:pa/eml

Enclosures