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## 'Here We Are Again'

Staff

Charleston

The office of the state Consumer Advocate is focusing on staffing levels for West Virginia American Water Company as part of its opposition to the company's request for a 13 percent rate increase.

Deputy Consumer Advocate Tony Sade questioned WVAWC President Wayne Morgan during the opening hours of the first day of the state Public Service Commission's evidentiary hearing Monday.

Sade asked Morgan why the company decreased its staffing levels following the 2009 rate case soon after the PSC had granted the company an increase.

"The numbers speak for themselves," Morgan answered. "We continually work to staff our positions to make sure we can absolutely serve our customers."

Sade also said Monday that for most of this year the company has had vacancies, but right before the beginning of Monday's hearing had almost every position filled.

West Virginia Water maintains it needs the latest increase to pay for repairs, upgrades and long-term investments. The Consumer Advocate Division says the company has been "relentless" in its attempt to raise rates.

Before Sade asked Morgan the first question Monday morning he said, "Here we are again and it seems like just yesterday we were doing this." Morgan did not respond.

The evidentiary hearing is scheduled to last all week. The PSC will hand down a decision in April.

The commission has received dozens of letters from WVAWC customers against the increase.

Since 2008, WVAWC residential rates have gone up 19.04 percent.

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