

BEFORE

THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF OHIO

In the Matter of the Application of)
Volunteer Energy Services, Inc., for) Case No. 02-1786-GA-CRS
Certification as a Competitive Retail)
Natural Gas Supplier.)

ENTRY

The attorney examiner finds:

- (1) On July 16, 2002, Volunteer Energy Services, Inc., (Volunteer) filed an application for certification as a competitive retail natural gas supplier, together with a motion for a protective order covering exhibits C-1, C-3, C-4, and C-5. That motion was granted on July 14, 2003, for a period of six months. Inasmuch as no motion for extension of the protective order was ever filed, that protective order expired on January 14, 2004.
- (2) On July 21, 2004, Volunteer filed an application for renewal of its certificate, together with a motion for a protective order covering Exhibits C-3, C-4, and C-5. On August 12, 2004, that motion was granted for a period of 18 months. Inasmuch as no motion for extension of the protective order was ever filed, that protective order expired on February 12, 2006.
- (3) On July 7, 2006, Volunteer filed an application for renewal of its certificate, together with a motion for a protective order covering Exhibits C-3, C-4, and C-5. On January 8, 2007, that motion was granted with regard to Exhibits C-3, C-5, and portions of C-4, for a period of 24 months. That motion is set to expire on January 8, 2009.
- (4) On July 30, 2008, Volunteer filed an application for renewal of its certificate, together with a motion, under consideration here, for a protective order covering Exhibits C-3 and C-5.
- (5) Section 4905.07, Revised Code, provides that all facts and information in the possession of the Commission shall be public, except as provided in Section 149.43, Revised Code, and as consistent with the purposes of Title 49 of the Revised Code. Section 149.43, Revised Code, specifies that the term "public

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records" excludes information which, under state or federal law, may not be released. The Ohio Supreme Court has clarified that the "state or federal law" exemption is intended to cover trade secrets. *State ex rel. Besser v. Ohio State*, 89 Ohio St.3d 396, 399 (2000).

- (6) Similarly, Rule 4901-1-24, Ohio Administrative Code (O.A.C.), allows an attorney examiner to issue an order to protect the confidentiality of information contained in a filed document, "to the extent that state or federal law prohibits release of the information, including where the information is deemed . . . to constitute a trade secret under Ohio law, and where non-disclosure of the information is not inconsistent with the purposes of Title 49 of the Revised Code."
- (7) Ohio law defines a trade secret as "information . . . that satisfies both of the following: (1) It derives independent economic value, actual or potential, from not being generally known to, and not being readily ascertainable by proper means by, other persons who can obtain economic value from its disclosure or use. (2) It is the subject of efforts that are reasonable under the circumstances to maintain its secrecy." Section 1333.61(D), Revised Code. The Ohio Supreme Court has adopted the following six factors to be used in analyzing a claim that information is a trade secret under that section:
 - (a) The extent to which the information is known outside the business.
 - (b) The extent to which it is known to those inside the business, i.e., by the employees.
 - (c) The precautions taken by the holder of the trade secret to guard the secrecy of the information.
 - (d) The savings effected and the value to the holder in having the information as against competitors.
 - (e) The amount of effort or money expended in obtaining and developing the information.

- (f) The amount of time and expense it would take for others to acquire and duplicate the information.

State ex rel. The Plain Dealer v. Ohio Dept. of Ins., 80 Ohio St.3d 513, 524-525 (1997).

- (8) The Ohio Supreme Court has found that an *in camera* inspection is necessary to determine whether materials are entitled to protection from disclosure. *State ex rel. Allright Parking of Cleveland Inc. v. Cleveland*, 63 Ohio St. 3d 772 (1992).
- (9) Rule 4901-1-24(D)(1), O.A.C., also provides that, where confidential material can be reasonably redacted from a document without rendering the remaining document incomprehensible or of little meaning, redaction should be ordered rather than wholesale removal of the document from public scrutiny.
- (10) The attorney examiner finds that the same procedures applicable to the initial issuance of a protective order should be used for considering the extension of a protective order. Therefore, in order to determine whether to grant or to extend a protective order, it is necessary to review the materials in question; to assess whether the information constitutes a trade secret under Ohio law; to decide whether non-disclosure of the materials will be consistent with the purposes of Title 49, Revised Code; and to evaluate whether the confidential material can reasonably be redacted.
- (11) The exhibits covered by Volunteer's July 30, 2008, motion consist of financial statements and forecasted financial statements. Volunteer submits that these exhibits are competitively sensitive and highly proprietary business financial information and marketing plans. Further, Volunteer confirms that this information is confidential and is not generally known by or available to the general public. It stresses that public disclosure of the information covered by these exhibits would jeopardize its ability to negotiate and to compete in the market. The attorney examiner has reviewed the information in Exhibits C-3 and C-5 of Volunteer's 2008 renewal application, as well as the assertions set forth in its motion. Applying the requirements that the information have

independent economic value and be the subject of reasonable efforts to maintain its secrecy, as well as the six-factor test set forth by the Ohio Supreme Court, the attorney examiner finds that the exhibits filed with the 2008 application contain trade secret information. Their release is therefore prohibited under state law. The attorney examiner also finds that non-disclosure of this information is not inconsistent with the purposes of Title 49 of the Revised Code. Finally, the attorney examiner concludes that these exhibits cannot be reasonably redacted to remove the confidential information contained therein.

- (12) Rule 4901-1-24(F), O.A.C., provides that, unless otherwise ordered, protective orders under Rule 4901-1-24(D), O.A.C., automatically expire after 18 months. Rule 4901-1-24(D)(4), O.A.C., provides for protective orders relating to gas marketers' certification renewal applications to expire after 24 months.
- (13) The examiner finds that Volunteer's 2008 motion should be granted for a period of 24 months from the date of this entry. Therefore, until that date, the docketing division of the Commission should maintain Exhibits C-3 and C-5 of Volunteer's 2008 certification renewal application under seal.
- (14) Rule 4901-1-24(F), O.A.C., requires a party wishing to extend a protective order to file an appropriate motion at least forty-five days in advance of the expiration date. If Volunteer wishes to extend this confidential treatment, it should file an appropriate motion at least 45 days in advance of the expiration date. If no such motion is filed, the Commission may release this information to the public upon expiration of the protective order, without prior notice to Volunteer.

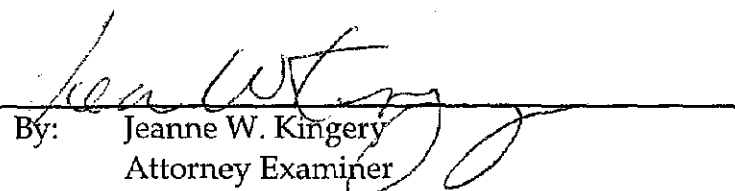
It is, therefore,

ORDERED, That the motion by Volunteer for protective treatment of Exhibits C-3 and C-5, filed on July 30, 2008, be granted for a period of 24 months from the date of this entry. It is, further,

ORDERED, That the Commission's docketing division shall maintain, under seal, exhibits C-3 and C-5 of Volunteer's 2008 certification renewal application, as filed on July 30, 2008, for a period of 24 months from the date of this entry. It is, further,

ORDERED, That a copy of this entry be served upon all parties of record.

THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF OHIO


By: Jeanne W. Kingery
Attorney Examiner

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Entered in the Journal

SEP 19 2008



Renee J. Jenkins
Secretary