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[20015001]

Commonwealth Edison Co. was ordered to refund about \$ 250 million to its current and former ratepayers for illegal rates collected for cost overruns on a nuclear power plant .

[20015002]

The refund was about \$ 55 million more than previously ordered by the Illinois Commerce Commission and trade groups said it may be the largest ever required of a state or local utility .

[20015004]

Judge Curry ordered the refunds to begin Feb. 1 and said that he would n't entertain any appeals or other attempts to block his order by Commonwealth Edison .

[20015006]

Commonwealth Edison said it is already appealing the underlying commission order and is considering appealing Judge Curry 's order .

[20015007]

The exact amount of the refund will be determined next year based on actual collections made until Dec. 31 of this year .

[20015008]

Commonwealth Edison said the ruling could force it to slash its 1989 earnings by \$ 1.55 a share .

[20015009]

For 1988 , Commonwealth Edison reported earnings of \$ 737.5 million , or \$ 3.01 a share .

[20015010]

A Commonwealth Edison spokesman said that tracking down the two million customers whose addresses have changed during the past 3 1/2 years would be " an administrative nightmare . "

[20015011]

In New York Stock Exchange composite trading yesterday , Commonwealth Edison closed at \$ 38.375 , down 12.5 cents .

[20015012]

The \$ 2.5 billion Byron 1 plant near Rockford , Ill. , was completed in 1985 .

[20015013]

In a disputed 1985 ruling , the Commerce Commission said Commonwealth Edison could raise its electricity rates by \$ 49 million to pay for the plant .

[20015014]

But state courts upheld a challenge by consumer groups to the commission 's rate increase and found the rates illegal .

[20015015]

The Illinois Supreme Court ordered the commission to audit Commonwealth Edison's construction expenses and refund any unreasonable expenses.

[20015018]

In his ruling, Judge Curry added an additional \$55 million to the commission's calculations.

[20015019]

Last month, Judge Curry set the interest rate on the refund at 9%.

[20015020]

Commonwealth Edison now faces an additional court-ordered refund on its summer/winter rate differential collections that the Illinois Appellate Court has estimated at \$140 million.

[20015021]

And consumer groups hope that Judge Curry's Byron 1 order may set a precedent for a second nuclear rate case involving Commonwealth Edison's Braidwood 2 plant.

[20015022]

Commonwealth Edison is seeking about \$245 million in rate increases to pay for Braidwood 2.

[20015023]

The commission is expected to rule on the Braidwood 2 case by year end.

[20015024]

Last year Commonwealth Edison had to refund \$72.7 million for poor performance of its LaSalle 1 nuclear plant.