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PSC Provides Tips to Minimize Natural Gas Heat Bill

MADISON – The Public Service Commission (PSC) is alerting Wisconsin residential natural gas consumers that cold temperatures and natural gas prices may lead to a higher heat bill this winter. Over the past several years, natural gas prices have been high in comparison to previous heating seasons. Residential natural gas heat bills may be similar to what they were during the 2002-2003 winter months if temperatures stay in the normal range for this time of year. Consumers should be aware of changing temperatures and adjust their thermostat to avoid a high heat bill.

TIPS FOR MINIMIZING HEAT BILLS

Whether heating with natural gas, propane, oil or electricity, the cost to keep warm during the cold winter months can be minimized if homeowners follow a few guidelines:

- Turn down the thermostat. Keep the thermostat set at about 68 degrees or cooler when family members are up, and about 60 degrees or cooler when everyone is in bed. For each degree you lower the thermostat in the winter, you can save between one and three percent (depending on the age of your furnace) on your heating bill.
- Install insulation in the attic, walls and sill box areas, along with adequate weather stripping and caulking around doors and windows to keep warm air in and the cold out.
- Use storm doors at all entrances to your home. Storm windows also help save energy costs. Both a storm window and/or a plastic film window kit can help stop drafts and cold air infiltration.
- Open drapes, blinds or shades on bright, sunny days to allow the warmth of the sun to penetrate your home. In the evening, close drapes and pull the shades to keep interior heat from radiating back outside.
- Energy efficient lighting can also help keep your energy costs down. Compact fluorescent bulbs give off the same light as common incandescents for one-quarter of the energy. They also last about ten times longer.
- Hot water heaters are major energy users in the home since they operate continuously. By keeping the water temperature setting at 120 degrees or lower, you can save on monthly energy costs.

Financial aid may be available from the local utility or county for customers needing assistance in paying their heat bill. Information on how and where to apply can be obtained by contacting the utility or county directly.

Residential Winter Conservation Heating and Safety Tips

<http://psc.wi.gov/alerts/consumer/winter.htm>

Understanding Your Natural Gas Bill

<http://psc.wi.gov/consumer/brochure/document/1000B.pdf>

Wisconsin Division of Energy (helpful information on heating fuels, reading your utility bill, conservation and payment assistance)

http://www.doa.state.wi.us/section_detail.asp?linkcatid=425

Division of Energy (weatherization services to eligible households and organizations)

<http://www.doa.state.wi.us/energy/documents/wxbrochure.pdf>

Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program (statewide program for bill payment assistance)

<http://heat.doa.state.wi.us>

Wisconsin Focus on Energy

www.focusonenergy.com

INCREASE IN PRICES

Wisconsin’s natural gas supply comes mainly from Texas, Oklahoma and Louisiana, although a small portion also comes from western Canada. A fixed supply of natural gas and an increased demand by industrial and residential customers across the nation have caused natural gas prices to rise. Although Wisconsin utilities may plan for frigid winter months, they share the natural gas supply with users in all 50 states. Utilities purchase natural gas at the deregulated national market price, which is based on supply and demand. The market price is passed onto consumers as a natural gas purchased price on a utility bill. While the PSC approves a utility’s strategy to purchase natural gas, and monitors actual purchase costs, the only natural gas charge the PSC controls under Wisconsin and federal law is the pipeline distribution charge for delivering natural gas from the utility to Wisconsin consumers.

Below are monthly averages for heating a home by natural gas last winter.

2002-2003 Winter Season (November 2002 – March 2003)		
	Average Monthly Usage (Therms)	Average Monthly Bill
Alliant Energy	119	124.57
Madison Gas & Electric	119	102.74
Northern States Power	108	96.34
WE Energies – Wisconsin Gas Company	129	113.78
WE Energies – Wisconsin Electric Gas Operations	126	108.67
Wisconsin Public Service Corporation	129	110.51