

To Keep Electric And Natural Gas Costs Down, The ICC Urges Customers To Follow Winter Energy Savings Tips

February 19 2021 11:23 AM

SPRINGFIELD - The Illinois Commerce Commission is continuing to monitor the power situation in Texas and other areas of the country experiencing extreme weather events and warns that increases in wholesale energy prices could have an impact on some Illinois electric and natural gas customers. The ICC is urging customers to follow winter energy-saving smart tips to keep utility bills down.

“Despite all of the recent snow and cold, Illinois has not experienced significantly extended power outages. Each fall, the ICC holds a winter preparedness policy session to make sure the utilities we regulate have adequate supplies on hand to meet the demands of a harsh winter. Advanced planning has served our state well,” said ICC Chairman Carrie Zalewski. “The ICC continues to monitor and learn from the situation in Texas and other areas of the country, and we encourage all consumers to protect themselves from potential price spikes by conserving energy as safely as possible.”

The role of the ICC is to ensure that natural gas companies that it regulates (including, among others, Ameren Illinois, Nicor, and Illinois Peoples Gas) plan ahead and have an adequate supply on hand. As a way to protect consumers from price spikes, these companies buy natural gas in advance of the season which they store in gas fields until needed. The larger companies are also more diversified in their sources for gas, which keeps prices low. Similarly, electric distribution utilities (ComEd, Ameren, Mid-American) that supply electricity to customers must also plan ahead to ensure adequate supply. This is in part done through electric procurements through the Illinois Power Agency and approved by the Commission. These companies also rely upon electricity and related services purchased through regional transmission organizations. The larger companies avail themselves of more diversified sources of electricity, which mitigates price spikes. However, for both natural gas and electric, inclement weather and rising demand may cause increased rates for customers.

It is important to note that municipal and cooperative systems, which could be significantly impacted by increased wholesale natural gas charges, are not regulated by the ICC. They are governed by municipal governments and their own elected boards.

Illinois customers who choose to buy their energy from Alternative Electric Retail Suppliers (ARES) or Alternative Gas Suppliers (AGS) may experience higher prices this winter as well because of variable rates in contracts.

Here are a few ICC Smart Tips you can follow to reduce your energy usage:

- Set your thermostat at 68 degrees while you are awake and home, lower at night and while you are away;
- Turn down your water heater to 120 degrees;
- If you have an older water heater tank, consider adding an insulated jacket or blanket;
- Cover the inside of drafty windows with heavy plastic sheeting, seal tightly to the frame to avoid air infiltration;
- Use insulated curtains, shades, or other energy-efficient window treatments;
- Schedule a maintenance service call for your heating system. Be sure to change filters on furnaces and heat pumps at least once a month. For wood and pellet-burning heaters, clean the flue vent regularly and clean the interior of the appliances with a wire brush;
- On sunny days, allow natural light to filter in south-facing windows to warm your home;
- Reverse the direction of ceiling fan blades in the winter to circulate warm air;
- If you have a fireplace, keep the damper closed unless a fire is burning.

As a reminder, a voluntary moratorium is currently in place for all residential customers of Ameren Illinois, ComEd, Liberty Utilities, Nicor, North Shore and Peoples Gas through March 31, 2021. In addition, Aqua Illinois, Illinois American Water and Utility Services of Illinois have agreed to cease disconnections of participants in the State's LIHEAP or Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP) and those who self-report to the utility that they are suffering financial or COVID 19 related hardship until March 31, 2021. The Commission strongly encourages consumers struggling or unable to pay their bill to call their utility immediately and explain their hardship situation.

In addition, funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) which helps cover the costs for natural gas, propane, or electricity used to heat a home remains available. To see if you qualify or for information about how to apply, call 1-877-411-9276 or visit the [Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity](#) website.

A copy of the ICC Smart Tips Winter Energy Savings campaign flyer can be obtained [here](#).

