



News Release

Lowering the Thermostat a Couple of Degrees Can Lower Your Utility Bill; PSE Offers Tips for Managing Higher Heating Bills as Chilly Weather Hits

BELLEVUE, Wash., Nov 7, 2003 (BUSINESS WIRE) -- The Northwest's recent plunge in temperatures caused long-slumbering furnaces to return to work full-time. So it won't be long before the perennial spike in energy use greets consumers with higher utility bills.

Puget Sound Energy (PSE) is offering a variety of tips for taking some of the sting out of those inflated winter utility bills. Tip No. 1 requires nothing more than a simple turn of the wrist: lower the thermostat a couple of degrees.

"That first utility bill of the winter can be quite a jolt for some people," said Janet Gaines, PSE director of customer service. "This year could be even more startling because the past couple of winters were quite mild, resulting in comparatively low heating bills. On top of that, the cost of natural gas has increased this year."

The rates PSE customers pay for natural gas periodically are adjusted -- up or down -- in response to fluctuations in the price PSE pays for gas on the wholesale market. PSE passes through its gas-purchase costs to customers without mark-up or profit to the utility. Because of rising wholesale gas prices, Gaines noted, retail rates for PSE gas customers will be about 30 percent higher this winter than last year.

Consumers can take some simple steps now, Gaines said, to control their heating bills in anticipation of colder weather. A few no-cost and low-cost actions offer a quick payback in saved energy and reduced utility bills:

- Furnace thermostat setback: Lowering a furnace thermostat is one of the best ways to lower heating bills. A consistent thermostat set-back can cut a home's energy usage by 15 percent. Keep the thermostat at the lowest comfortable setting when people are active inside a home or business. When people are sleeping, set the thermostat to the lowest acceptable temperature. When people are away from a home or business, use the lowest possible temperature setting (but don't set it so low that water pipes freeze).
- Caulking and weather stripping: Keeping warm air in homes and businesses cuts heating costs and provides more comfort. Check around windows and doors for air leaks. Apply weather stripping and door sweeps to reduce air leaks around entry doors, and use caulk to seal up air leaks around windows.
- Insulation: Check to see if your home or business has enough insulation in wall cavities, crawl spaces and attics to make heating equipment operate efficiently.
- Furnace maintenance: Proper furnace maintenance increases efficiency and reduces energy costs. Clogged furnace filters lessen heating efficiency by reducing air circulation to and from a furnace. Clean or replace furnace filters monthly during the heating season, and have your system checked and serviced annually.

PSE customers looking to buy new heating equipment may be able to get rebates from the utility on the purchase of high-efficiency natural-gas water heaters and furnaces. PSE also offers rebates on Energy Star(R)-labeled compact fluorescent light bulbs, which use 75 percent less energy and last 10 times longer than incandescent bulbs.

To help customers manage their energy bills, Puget Sound Energy also offers a "Budget Payment Plan" that allows customers to avoid steep bills in winter by paying about the same amount each month, spread over a 12-month period.

"The Budget Payment Plan works really well for customers who want to budget their monthly expenses and know in advance the approximate amount of their PSE bill," Gaines said.

Besides the budget-payment option PSE offers, low-income families having difficulty managing their energy bills can take advantage of PSE's HELP fund. The year-round program provides eligible households up to \$750 per year in assistance with their natural gas or electricity bills. PSE's HELP fund, like the federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, is administered by local community-action agencies. For a listing of those agencies, call PSE toll-free at 1-866-223-5425.

To sign up for PSE's Budget Payment Plan, call 1-888-225-5773. For information about energy-efficiency rebates, to schedule a service checkup for natural gas furnaces, or to speak to a PSE Energy Advisor, call 1-800-562-1482, or visit PSE's Web site at www.pse.com.

SOURCE: Puget Sound Energy

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