

CONSUMER **Utility rates to rise for ComEd customers**

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By Sarah Schulte

**CHICAGO (WLS) -- For the second time this year, utility rates are on the rise.**

Commonwealth Edison customers can expect their bills to jump an average of \$4.50 a month.

The ComEd rate hike was approved Wednesday morning by the Illinois Commerce Commission.

The utility claims the extra money is needed to upgrade its infrastructure. But one consumer group said it will fight the rate hike.

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The Citizens' Utility Board has vowed to appeal Wednesday's rate hike. ComEd filed its request for a rate hike 11 months ago. Originally, the electric company proposed a \$361 million increase, but through compromise, that number was scaled down to \$270 million. Regardless, consumers are not getting a break.

Groceries, natural gas, gas at the pump and now electric bills are all going in one direction - up.

The electric company has been approved to it increase its delivery charge.

"Everything goes up except your salary," said one man.

"Nobody needs four extra dollars on any bill," said a woman.

ComEd says the increase will help pay to replace and repair its century-old infrastructure. The Citizens Utility Board said they don't buy it.

"We've analyzed the books," said Jim Chilsen, CUB. "We've looked at what

ComEd's expenses are. And we believe that they've inflated their expenses to try to justify this large rate hike that they didn't deserve."

Given the current economy, the ICC's chairman admitted it was a tough decision to grant ComEd its rate increase, but it's all about a balancing act.

"We have a duty to protect the consumers and rate payers, and we do," said Charles Box, ICC. "We also have to make the sure companies are viable financially."

And while ComEd customers know they have no choice but to pay their monthly bills, many said they wonder why can't the electric company look at their own budget before turning to its rate payers.

"CEOs and CFOs are making huge amounts of money, and none of it is coming back to the consumers," said one woman.

"They've gone up and I'm sure there's been feather-bedding. I'm sure they could find a way to cut costs. But why cut costs when when pass it on to the poor paying public," said one man.

ABC7 made several requests for an on-camera interview with ComEd, but the company did not want to comment until it had the official order from the ICC. The ICC says utilities are now asking for rate increases about every two years. Consumers are likely to see the latest one on their November bills.

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