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Ill. regulators approve \$162M Ameren rate increase

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SPRINGFIELD, Ill.

State regulators on Wednesday approved a \$162 million annual rate increase for Ameren Illinois natural gas and electric customers, money the company said will fund infrastructure improvements throughout its coverage area.



The Illinois Commerce Commission approved the increase, which will take effect Oct. 1, after rejecting Ameren's original request for a \$247 million increase.

Afterward, the Citizens Utility Board, a consumer watchdog group, said it would appeal the ICC's ruling, claiming the utility inflated its expenses to justify the increase.

"Ameren overstated its expenses to justify an exorbitant rate hike it doesn't need or deserve, and that's why we plan to appeal," CUB Executive Director David Kolata said.

"That's the last thing Ameren customers need as they face tough economic times, soaring energy prices, and an expensive Illinois winter."

Ameren Illinois spokesman Leigh Morris denied CUB's allegation, saying the ICC carefully examined the request over several months.

Ameren's three Illinois utilities serve a total of 1.2 million electric customers and 825,000 gas customers. Rates changes will be based on customers' usage.

Electric bills for customers of Peoria-based AmerenCILCO will decrease about 55 cents per month, while natural gas bills will decrease by up to \$9 during colder months and increase by about \$2 the rest of the year. Springfield-based AmerenCIPS customers will pay a maximum of \$7 more each month for electricity and as much as \$6 more for gas.

Decatur-based AmerenIP electric customers will be hardest hit. Their bills will increase by up to \$18 per month. Gas will cost as much as \$9 more a month.

The Ameren rate increases apply only to delivery charges, not the actual cost of electricity and natural gas.

The AARP said the hike comes "at the worst possible time" and that the ICC had "let down the people of Illinois."

Two weeks ago, the ICC approved a \$270 million rate increase for ComEd customers in northern Illinois. Both Ameren and ComEd were criticized after Illinois consumers' power bills doubled and tripled when a 10-year rate freeze expired last year.

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