

The logo for 'thrive!' features the word in a lowercase, sans-serif font. Each letter is a different color: 't' is blue, 'h' is green, 'r' is orange, 'i' is red, 'v' is purple, 'e' is yellow, and '!' is red. The letters are slightly shadowed, giving a 3D effect.

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Electric bill break in Illinois

BY jeffrey tomich

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Electricity prices at Ameren Corp.'s Illinois utilities will drop on June 1, just in time for many customers to switch on their air conditioners.

St. Louis-based Ameren said electricity prices, displayed as the "electric supply" charge on bills, will fall an average of 8 percent. For the typical residential customer who uses 10,000 kilowatt-hours, the price cut will generate about \$100 a year in savings, Ameren said. The specific amount of the decrease will vary from customer to customer according to usage.

The decrease reflects a drop in wholesale electricity prices, reflecting a sputtering economy that has sapped energy demand.

Electric bills for Ameren's Illinois customers shot up on Jan. 1, 2007, as artificially low rates gave way to market-based rates with the deregulation of the state's wholesale electricity market.

Increases of 40 percent, 50 percent — even a doubling of rates for customers who heated their homes with electricity — sparked outrage among customers and politicians. Ultimately, utilities, lawmakers and the state attorney general negotiated a \$1 billion rate-relief package that included refunds for customers.

The settlement led the state to scrap a controversial process that utilities had used to buy power for their customers and created the Illinois Power Agency. Now, the agency buys wholesale electricity for all of the investor-owned utilities in the state, including AmerenIP CIPS and Cilco.

Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan and the Citizens Utility Board, a consumer group, said the drop in rates is proof the new power procurement process is working.

"Consumers have a much more even playing field than they ever would under the

auction," said Jim Chilsen, a CUB spokesman.

A spokeswoman for Ameren's Illinois utilities didn't return a phone call seeking comment.

The price of electricity makes up about two-thirds of a customer's bill. Ameren's utilities no longer own power plants and don't make money on the sale of electricity, but the holding company's unregulated generating subsidiary does profit by selling power in Illinois.

Utilities are required to enter three-year contracts with power suppliers for about a third of their power needs. Layering power contracts minimizes price volatility.

The other third of bills reflects the cost of delivering electricity and the utility's profit.

Ameren's Illinois utilities plan to file for an electric rate increase later this spring or in early summer, the company has said. The utilities got a \$161 million rate increase in September.

Ameren has 1.2 million electric customers in central and Southern Illinois and 850,000 natural gas customers.

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