



CITIZENS UTILITY BOARD

Fighting for Illinois Consumers

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CONSUMER ALERT: TIPS TO BATTLE BITTER COLD AT HOME

The Citizens Utility Board (CUB) on Tuesday released tips for Illinoisans to keep their homes safe and warm, after Gov. J.B. Pritzker issued a disaster proclamation for all 102 counties in response to a winter storm that hit Illinois with dangerously low temperatures and deep snow.

“Our top priority is to keep our homes safe and warm during this dangerous time, and energy efficiency can help do that,” CUB Executive Director David Kolata said. CUB’s quick tips:

Don't take risks. Don't use your oven to heat your home. If you use a space heater, place it on a hard, level surface; don't use an extension cord; keep it at least three feet away from flammable objects such as the couch or curtains; and don't leave it on overnight. Keep your home at a safe temperature (about 68-70 degrees). Blasting the heat can be bad for your heating bills, but going too low is dangerous to your health and can freeze pipes.

Don't overwork your heating system. Close blinds or cover your windows with blankets as an extra layer of protection against icy night winds. But open them during the day so sunlight can help heat your home. Clear radiators, registers, air returns and baseboards of obstructions. Dust, carpet and furniture can block the heat and leave a room chilly. You can't heat your home if the air isn't circulating.

Reduce the drafts. This bitter cold is an opportunity to pinpoint drafts in your home. Your hardware store can provide the materials to seal those leaks, but improvise if you have to over the next few days. For example, if you don't have a door guard or sweep to block cold air under your front and back doors, use a rolled up towel or rug to block the drafts.

Clean or replace filters for a forced-air heating system. A dirty or non-functioning filter does nothing but drain money from your wallet. Check it every month—and now is a great time to clean or replace it if it's dirty.

Beware of bad deals. If your gas or electric bill is skyrocketing, check to see if you're paying for a bad deal with an alternative supplier. Look if there's another company listed on the supply section of your utility bill.

Inquire about assistance. Extreme cold has led to frozen natural gas wells in other states, and the limits on supply along with increased demand may cause elevated gas prices in weeks to come. Homes that can't afford their heating bills should contact the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) to see if they qualify for assistance: **1-877-411-9276**.

Check on your neighbors. Make sure your neighbors are OK. KeepWarm.Illinois.gov has information on where Illinoisans can find warming centers.

CUB is Illinois' leading nonprofit utility watchdog. Created by the Illinois Legislature, CUB opened its doors in 1984 to represent the interests of residential and small-business utility customers. Since then, it has saved consumers more than \$20 billion by helping block rate hikes, secure refunds, and fight for clean, low-cost energy. For more information, call CUB's Consumer Hotline, 1-800-669-5556, or visit www.CitizensUtilityBoard.org.

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