



CITIZENS UTILITY BOARD

Fighting for Illinois Consumers

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

November 1, 2021

CONTACT: Jim Chilsen

(o) 312-263-4282, (c) 312-513-1784

WITH AN EXPENSIVE WINTER AHEAD, CUB HELP CENTER AIMS TO PROTECT CONSUMERS FROM BALLOONING NATURAL GAS BILLS

Illinois consumers are facing the possibility of hundreds of dollars in higher heating bills this winter due to skyrocketing natural gas prices and aggressive utility spending. Supply rates went up again on Nov. 1, with major utilities charging about double 2020 prices. The Citizens Utility Board (CUB) has launched an online help center to advise gas customers on how to soften the blow of these potentially crippling price increases.

CUB alerted consumers to CUBHelpCenter.com. The new site explains why gas prices are high, offers efficiency and safety tips, outlines a customer's rights against disconnection and arms consumers with information about energy assistance and alternative suppliers. (This resource also is [available in Spanish](#).)

The consumer group also called on utilities and government officials to provide more energy assistance this winter, and it urged people struggling to pay their bills to contact their utilities to inquire about payment plans and assistance available.

Winter prices are at their highest level since the heating season of 2008-09. Here are the prices per therm for Illinois' major utilities as of Nov. 1:

- Ameren Illinois – 68.084 cents per therm (101 percent higher than last November)
- Nicor Gas – 68 cents per therm (143 percent higher than last November)
- North Shore Gas – 68.440 cents per therm (77 percent higher than last November)
- Peoples Gas – 73.870 cents per therm (164 percent higher than last November)

“Many consumers were already having a hard time paying their bills due to the financial impact of the pandemic, so these skyrocketing natural gas prices are not helping anyone,” CUB Outreach Director Ivonne Rychwa said. “We urge consumers to reach out to their utility to see if they are eligible for assistance and to prevent disconnection.”

CUB highlighted a number of key points concerning the expensive winter:

Consumers should contact their utilities. Heating customers struggling to afford their utility bills are encouraged to contact their utility and express financial hardship. Your utility may offer payment arrangements or financial assistance.

Utilities need to step up. The consumer group called on utilities to set aside shareholder money to help consumers afford their bills this winter. Nicor Gas recently announced that it contributed \$5 million in shareholder money for a program with the Salvation Army to give out grants of up to \$250 to consumers in need who are behind on their gas bills. CUB also urged utilities to be flexible to keep their customers connected this winter.

-more-

309 W. Washington St., Suite 800, Chicago, IL 60606

Phone (312) 263-4282 | Toll Free 800-669-5556 | Fax (312) 263 4329



CITIZENS UTILITY BOARD

Fighting for Illinois Consumers

More energy assistance is needed. CUB urged state and federal officials to increase energy assistance for Illinois consumers this winter and beyond.

Practice energy efficiency. CUB's Help Center offers tips on cutting utility bills through energy efficiency, and it gives information on no-cost utility programs that can help customers make their homes more efficient.

Beware of bad deals. Alternative supplier sales representatives may use the high gas prices to lure customers into bad deals. The natural gas market has been plagued by high-priced offers and misleading marketing. Even with these high prices, it's likely the utility is still your best bet.

Illinois needs long-term policy changes. In addition to fighting for immediate relief for gas customers, CUB said this high-priced winter is further proof of the need for reform. For years, CUB has called on the state to rein in aggressive gas utility spending. Also, the consumer group said it's time to begin planning for the transition away from natural gas, a fossil fuel. As this winter shows, gas is getting more and more expensive, and it does not fit with clean energy goals designed to fight the most expensive and dangerous effects of climate change.

These high gas prices are one of the lingering effects of the extreme, climate change-induced cold snap that brought record-low temperatures across the nation last February. The cold froze natural gas pipelines and wellheads in the South, limiting supply across the country as heating demand increased. This led to skyrocketing prices. There are other contributing factors, such as decreased gas exploration and well construction.

And there is yet another reason for high bills: Major gas utilities in the state have launched aggressive spending plans in recent years that have increased another section of bills: delivery rates, what the companies charge customers to deliver gas to homes.

Under state law, Ameren Illinois, Nicor Gas and Peoples Gas are allowed to hit customers with a special surcharge, the Qualified Infrastructure Plant charge, which has grown on gas bills. In fact, a Peoples Gas pipe-replacement program criticized for overspending and mismanagement is expected to help double fixed costs to as much as \$80 per month in the next 10 years.

Plus, companies have pushed for higher delivery rates. Back in January, Ameren received a \$76 million rate hike, and Nicor is currently asking for a \$198.8 million increase—the utility's third rate-hike request in four years.

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 its award-winning website, www.CitizensUtilityBoard.org.

###