

Prepare for Higher Natural Gas Bills This Winter

As you may have seen in recent news coverage, natural gas prices are at a 13-year high. Prices are expected to continue to remain higher this winter due to supply availability and rising demand. Since natural gas customers increase usage during these upcoming cold months, Waukeee gas customers will likely see an increase to upcoming utility bills.



The current market situation has increased the cost for the City of Waukeee's Gas Utility to purchase the natural gas it delivers to customers. While City officials are doing everything feasible to minimize costs, customers should prepare now for higher monthly heating bills this winter.

"The City strategically purchases a portion of the City's average monthly gas usage in advance to ensure our rates are as low as possible," said Waukeee Public Works Director Rudy Koester. "Unfortunately, the higher market prices right now will affect our customers' gas supply charge, which is the direct cost of the natural gas the customer uses without any mark-up by the City."

Market price fluctuations do affect rates, which also include fixed administrative costs, as well as costs associated with maintaining and operating the existing gas utility system safely. Actual bill impacts will vary by customer due to usage as temperatures get colder and market prices continue to fluctuate.

Users Can Help Offset Increases Through Energy Efficiency

Here are some helpful steps customers can take to help reduce energy use and save on monthly bills:

- Be smart when setting your thermostat. By setting your thermostat as low as is comfortable, you'll save money. Set it even cooler while you're sleeping. You can also save with a programmable thermostat that automatically adjusts the indoor temperature when you're away or sleeping.
- Service your furnace. Have your furnace serviced once a year to ensure it's working safely and efficiently. Clean or replace filters once a month or as recommended by the manufacturer.
- Set your water heater to 120 degrees. The U.S. Department of Energy recommends setting your water heater to 120° F, which is not enough to cause scalding but is still hot enough to keep diseases at bay and is considered relatively energy efficient.
- Seal leaks. Locate and seal any leaks from your air ducts. Use weather stripping to help seal leaky windows and doors.

- Check your insulation. Consider whether you need to add to or replace your home's insulation. Insulation reduces energy demand in both the winter and summer.
- Close your drapes at night. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, closing your drapes at night during the winter can help reduce heat loss in a room up to 10 percent. During the day, open your south-facing drapes and shades to take advantage of the sunshine.
- The City also offers its Gas Rebate Program for replacement of old gas furnaces and water heaters with high efficiency gas furnaces and water heaters. Rebates are also offered for the purchase of new replacement gas stoves, gas clothes dryers and gas fireplaces.

New Opportunities offers weatherization assistance for those who cannot afford and/or physically perform the above tasks. Call 515-465-5185 for more information.

Budget Billing

The City of Waukee offers its Budget Billing program to help customers ease bill fluctuations, especially during the cold months. The program is free for customers and stabilizes utility charges that vary by changing seasons and different energy usage patterns. Customers can enroll by calling the Utility Billing Department at 515-978-5502. This is open to utility customers who have been living at their current address for at least one year, regardless of income.

Utility Assistance Programs

The City encourages any customer facing financial hardship to communicate with the Waukee Utility Billing Department to discuss options and potential assistance. Payment plans can be discussed by calling the department at 515-978-5502.

The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) helps qualifying low-income homeowners and renters pay for a portion of their primary heating costs for the winter heating season. This program is not designed to pay a household's total energy costs, but to provide assistance in the payment of residential heating costs. For more information, call 515-465-5185 to schedule an appointment with New Opportunities. See eligibility requirements at <https://humanrights.iowa.gov/dcaa/liheap>.

Waukee Area Christian Services can also provide assistance to those who qualify. Staff can be reached on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays at 515-987-5523.