

**THE NEW HAMPSHIRE
RATE WATCHER**
(It's Your Money)

The Consumer Newsletter of the
New Hampshire Office of Consumer Advocate
21 S. Fruit Street, Suite 18
Concord, NH 03301
603-271-1172
website: www.oca.nh.gov

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*Q. What is the best defense against high fuel prices this season?
A. Energy conservation, efficiency and renewable energy!*

Federal Energy Policy Act of 2005

The Federal Energy Policy Act of 2005 was signed into law on August 8th. This law is intended to reduce our dependence on foreign oil, increase conservation and expand the use of clean renewable energy.

To accomplish those goals, the law provides tax credits to consumers for using energy efficient products or renewable energy in their homes and automobiles. A tax credit reduces your federal income tax liability dollar for dollar in the amount of the credit, which is unlike a tax deduction that only lowers your taxable income.

Some areas of direct benefits to residential consumers effective January 2006 are:

- A credit of up to 30% of the cost, or up to \$2,000 maximum, for installing solar-powered hot-water systems used exclusively for purposes other than heating swimming pools and hot tubs.
- A 10% tax credit of up to a lifetime maximum of \$500 on energy saving improvements, including upgrading thermostats, caulking leaks, and installing insulation, energy-efficient windows, skylights or doors.

The credit per improvement is a maximum of:

- ❖ \$200 for installation of new exterior windows.
- ❖ \$300 for purchases of a highly efficient central air conditioner, heat pump or water heater.
- ❖ \$150 for installation of a highly efficient furnace or boiler.
- Credits for purchases of advanced main air circulating fans, natural gas, propane, or oil furnaces or hot water boilers, and other qualified energy efficient property.
- Tax credits for contractors who build energy-efficient homes and manufacturers who make energy-efficient appliances could lower prices for consumers.

For your car:

- Extension of an existing tax credit, for as much as \$4,000, for buyers of electric cars or those powered by rechargeable batteries.
- Starting in 2006, hybrid-car buyers and advanced lean-burn technology vehicles will be eligible for tax credits ranging from \$1,700-\$3,000.

A good resource for the learning more about these and other financial incentives available to consumers from the new Federal Energy Policy Act of 2005 is www.powerisinyourhands.org.

Electricity Prices...Expect Increases

Compared to a year ago the whole nation has seen increases in the prices for gasoline, natural gas, heating oil and propane. How do these increases impact NH electric rates?

In NH and throughout New England electricity generators use fuels such as natural gas, oil, coal, wood, hydro and nuclear energy to generate your electricity. The most current rate increases for electric rates as well as those expected in the next few months are driven by the increases in the cost of fuels used to generate electricity. These costs are unusually high due, in part, to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and increased demand.

The Office of Consumer Advocate encourages every NH citizen to take the necessary steps to assure your budget and safety during the winter season.

Energy Conservation is extremely important during this time. Conserving energy and/or installing renewable energy is the best defense consumers have against the threat of a blackout. On November 16, 2005, the Independent System Operators of New England (ISO NE) issued a press release alerting the region about the anticipated tight electricity supply and stressing the need for energy conservation due to potential record high winter demand and the lingering effects of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita on natural gas and oil production in the Gulf of Mexico. There are many resources available to NH citizens to figure out the best ways to conserve.

A few very helpful websites when looking for tips, resources, and booklets are: the Office of Energy and Planning at www.nh.gov/oep; the US Department of Energy at www.energy.gov; and a new website by the Alliance to Save Energy and the American Gas Association at www.powerisinyourhands.org.

You may also contact your utility and ask them for suggestions or programs available to you.

Renewable Energy (i.e., solar, wind, geothermal, wood) could be a solution for you. In addition to the savings you gain from using renewable sources of energy, you may be eligible for rebates or other government sponsored incentives. To learn more about these incentives go to the Database of State Incentives for Renewable Energy website at www.dsireusa.org. Once there, click on NH to see incentives for NH residents.

New Hampshire Assistance Programs

This winter, with increases to the costs of electricity and heating, it will be even more difficult than ever to manage your expenses. NH has some great programs available to help consumers manage the costs of utilities, but funding is limited and available on a first-come-first-served basis.

Low Income Heating Assistance Program (LIHEAP) – As funds permit, this program provides benefits to qualified households to assist with heating costs. For information regarding eligibility, please contact your local Community Action Agency (see list on page 3).

Electric Assistance Program (EAP) – As funds permit, this program helps income-eligible customers pay their electric bills. To find out if you are eligible, please contact your local Community Action Agency (see list on page 3).

Neighbor Helping Neighbor – This program, which is funded by contributions from utility customers, helps income-qualified customers pay their electric or gas expenses. For more information, contact your electric or gas utility or your local Community Action Agency (see list on page 3).

Weatherization – This program helps qualified individuals reduce household energy use and costs by installing energy-efficiency improvements. For more information about this program, contact: Andy Gray, Program Manager, Office of Energy and Planning

at (603) 271-2155 or e-mail:
andrew.gray@nh.gov.

Gas Assistance Program - This program helps income-eligible residential heating customers with their natural gas bills. For more information, contact your gas utility or your local Community Action Agency (see list on page 3).

Balanced billing and budget billing are available from most utilities. Payment plans are available from all utilities. To learn more about your payment options, contact your utility.

Energy Efficiency Programs

“Core” Programs - these programs serve residential, commercial and industrial customers. They include programs for new construction, retrofitting existing structures, and rebate programs for selected lighting and appliances.

Additional details on the “Core” energy efficiency programs may be found by visiting www.NHSaves.com or by calling the toll free number 1-866-266-2420.

2005/2006 Weatherization Rebate Program for Northern Utility Customers

Special Energy Efficiency Weatherization Rebate Program for residential heating customers to obtain a rebate of up to \$25 per customer for qualifying measures such as weather stripping, caulking, foam insulation spray, pipe insulation, garage door seals etc. The rebate applies only to measures purchased between October 1, 2005 and April 30, 2006. Northern Utilities web site. Please contact Northern or visit their website for more information, www.northernutilities.com.

Community Action Agencies

The Community Action Agencies are private, non-profit organizations who serve their communities by assisting low-income individuals to meet important individual and family needs, including health, nutrition, housing, employment, and to promote self-sufficiency.

Belknap/Merrimack Counties

www.bm-cap.org

- Concord 225-6880
- Franklin 934-3444
- Laconia 524-5512
- Meredith 279-4096
- Suncook 485-7824
- Warner 456-2207

Rockingham Community Action

www.rcaction.org

- Portsmouth 436-3896/1-800-639-3896
- Salem 898-8435

Southern New Hampshire Services

www.snhshome.homestead.com

- Manchester 647-4470/1-800-322-1073
- Nashua 889-3440/1-877-211-0723
- Peterborough 924-2243

Southwestern Community Services

www.scshehelps.org

- Keene 352-7512/1-800-529-0005
- Claremont 542-9528

Strafford County Community Action

www.straffcap.org

- Dover 749-1334
- Milton 652-9893
- Rochester 332-3963
- Farmington 755-9305

Tri-County Community Action

www.tccap.org

- Berlin 752-3248
- Littleton 444-6653
- Colebrook 237-8168
- Plymouth 536-8222
- Lancaster 788-4477
- Woodsville 747-3013
- Lebanon 448-4553
- Carroll County 323-7400/1-888-842-3835

Energy Saving Tips!!!!

Install a programmable thermostat. Program lower temperatures for times you are out of the house or sleeping.

Turn down the thermostat. During each 24-hour period, you will save about 3% on your heating bill for every 1 degree that you lower the thermostat.

Maintain your furnace and replace dirty air filters.

Insulate your hot water tank and water pipes in uninsulated areas.

Install low-flow fixtures (*i.e.*, faucets and showerheads). You can purchase some quality, low-flow fixtures for around \$10 to \$20 a piece and achieve water savings of 25–60%.

Minor home remedies like caulking and weather stripping can save your money from going out the window.

Properly installed, window shades can be one of the simplest and most effective window treatments for saving energy. Drapes are also very effective, with a little work. To reduce heat exchange or convection, draperies should be hung as close to windows as possible and allowed to fall onto a windowsill or floor. For maximum effectiveness, install a cornice at the top of a drapery or place the drapery against the ceiling. Seal the drapery at both sides and

overlap it in the center. You can use Velcro or magnetic tape to attach drapes to the wall at the sides and bottom. If you do these things, you may reduce heat loss up to 25%.

- ❖ For more energy saving tips, visit the website of the U.S. Department of Energy, Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, www.eere.energy.gov/consumerinfo.

Office of Consumer Advocate

Main Number 603-271-1172

Website: www.oca.nh.gov

Personnel:

Consumer Advocate:
F. Anne Ross 603-271-1174

Asst. Consumer Advocate:
Ken Traum 603-271-1176

Attorney:
Rorie Hollenberg 603-271-1173

Utility Analyst:
Steve Merrill 603-271-1175

Legal Assistant:
Christina Martin 603-271-1172

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