NEWS & INFORMATION

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Communicate with your utility to cope with high cooling bills

Coping with high utility bills resulting from recent hot summer weather can be made easier if customers take some simple short-term or long-term steps to manage utility costs, according to the Iowa Utilities Board (IUB).

In the near term, customers should evaluate individual or family budgets and make necessary changes to accommodate the higher utility bills. Taking steps to use energy wisely, in addition to budgeting, can help many people get through high-cost months.

If you cannot pay your bill, you should contact your utility company to make payment arrangements. Working first with your utility is usually the best and fastest way to get the help you need. You should be able to find the telephone number to contact your utility company near the top of the first page of your bill.

If you are not in default on a previous payment agreement, your utility can offer you a reasonable payment agreement with the option of spreading payments for past-due amounts over at least 12 months and possibly longer based on your finances. A reasonable payment agreement takes into account your income, expenses, and extraordinary financial circumstances that may affect your ability to pay. It is very important that you give some forethought to what you can afford to pay every month, because you must abide by the terms of an accepted agreement. Missing a payment by even one day may void the agreement and make you subject to service disconnection with just one day's notice. For budgeting purposes, be aware that monthly payments as part of a payment agreement are expenses in addition to your future utility bills.

There are also long-range solutions for managing utility costs. Your utility can enroll you in a budget-billing program that will enable you to make equal monthly payments throughout the year. The utility sets the budget-billing amount based on your average costs and you pay the same amount each month. The monthly payment amount is adjusted from time-to-time to account for actual usage.

“Utility companies more readily work with customers trying to do the right thing,” said IUB Customer Service Manager Chuck Seel. “If you are having difficulty making your utility payments, it is important to contact your utility about your particular situation as soon as you can.”

After you've contacted your utility, if you still have questions or you and your utility cannot agree upon a payment arrangement, you can contact the IUB for assistance toll free at 1-877-565-4450, iubcustomer@iub.state.ia.us, or 350 Maple Street, Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0069.

Finally, in many circumstances, local Community Action Program agencies, churches, or other community organizations may be able to help customers having difficulty paying their utility bills if they inquire about financial assistance.

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The IUB is a utility regulatory agency. It enforces certain rules and regulations that utility companies must follow, including some pertaining to past due bills, customer disconnection and reconnection of utility services, and payment agreements. The IUB ensures that utility customers are treated fairly under those rules and regulations, which stem from Iowa law. All issues raised with the IUB are handled on a case-by-case basis with individual circumstances considered.