



NEWS & INFORMATION

350 Maple Street • Des Moines, Iowa 50319 • 515.281.5979

John Norris, Chairman

Krista Tanner, Board member

Darrell Hanson, Board member

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Contact: Rob Hillesland 515.281.3551

Email: rob.hillesland@iub.state.ia.us

Web site: www.state.ia.us/iub

ATTENTION LIHEAP CUSTOMERS: How to avoid spring utility disconnection

Iowa's residential heating customers who have been protected from credit disconnection of energy service because of the Winter Moratorium Law have about a month to pay heating bills that may have accumulated this winter or make payment arrangements with their local utility. Beginning April 2, they may become subject to disconnection of service. The Winter Moratorium on disconnections extends to households that qualified for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). Some Community Action Program (CAP) agencies may still have additional assistance funds from utility sponsored Customer Contribution Funds.

The extremely cold winter weather has allowed many non-LIHEAP customers to avoid credit disconnection by energy utilities under Iowa's cold weather rules which only apply while temperatures remain 20 degrees or colder. These customers with outstanding utility balances should contact their energy utility immediately to see what options are available to help them. Each customer's circumstances may differ, but utilities may be able to help by offering payment agreements to those who seek assistance and qualify. Customers who have exhausted their utility payment options may need to seek other assistance in their community. Those who haven't yet applied for LIHEAP should do so immediately. There may be funds available in some communities from other social service or church organizations.

LIHEAP funds can help offset the utility account balance, but don't usually cover the entire winter heating bill. The Iowa Utilities Board reminds customers protected from disconnection that they still have an obligation to continue paying as much as affordable on their utility bills, even if they can't pay the entire amount. Paying what can be afforded during the winter months lessens the amount owed when the disconnection protections expire. Customers who don't do this may be unprepared to pay their utility billing when the moratorium ends. Representatives of your utility and local CAP agencies may be able to help if you have any questions or concerns about the amount you owe. The telephone number of your local utility should be located on your monthly bill. Utility disconnect notices are required to include contact information for local CAP agencies, or call your utility and ask for the CAP agency number in your area.

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If you evaluate your finances and determine what you can afford will not be enough to pay your winter heating bills, contact your utility as soon as possible to determine all the options available for avoiding disconnection before it happens. Find out what type of payment arrangements may be available to you. Ask questions to make sure you understand how this will affect you and your financial situation. Feel free to call back later if you'd like to consider or discuss your options and what will work best for you before making a commitment. Once you have committed to a payment arrangement, it is very important to make all payments on time because missing a payment by even one day may void your payment agreement and allow the utility to disconnect your service with one day's notice.

Your utility may also provide long-term help to anyone that has difficulty paying high heating bills every winter by enrolling them in a level-payment or budget-billing program. This allows bill payment amounts to be spread over time. If you are not already enrolled in a level-payment plan, this could be beneficial because it eliminates surprises on the monthly bill and makes bill planning easier.

In addition to planning ahead about how to pay your utility bills, take all possible steps to use energy wisely. Cost savings can be achieved through energy efficiency measures like turning the thermostat down a few degrees, especially when away from home or when sleeping, if you can do so safely. A programmable thermostat can help you do this at peak efficiency. Another measure that can help save money and energy is sealing outside air leaks around windows and doors.

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