



NEWS & INFORMATION

350 Maple Street • Des Moines, Iowa 50319 • 515.281.5979

John Norris, Chairman

Darrell Hanson, Board member

Krista Tanner, 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

Your utility may be able to help you cope with high energy bills

Whether the result of recent hot summer weather or cold winter weather just a few months ahead, coping with high utility bills can be made easier if customers take some simple steps to manage their utility costs and work with their local utilities when necessary, according to the Iowa Utilities Board (IUB).

First, customers should take all possible steps to use energy wisely to help get through high-cost months. In hot weather, this can include minimal cost measures like turning the thermostat up a few degrees and using fans effectively, avoiding use of heat-producing appliances during the hottest times, and making sure air conditioners are free of obstructions. In cold weather, turn the thermostat down as much as possible, especially when sleeping or whenever the home is unoccupied. For winter comfort and safety, add layers of clothing and bedding. Other simple steps to conserve energy throughout the year are sealing air leaks on home exteriors and around windows and doors, having a home energy audit (many utilities offer this as a free service to customers), and investing in a programmable thermostat.

Customers should also evaluate individual or family budgets and make necessary changes to help accommodate the higher utility bills. If you still 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.

Also, enrolling in a budget-billing program through your utility may be a long-range solution to help manage utility costs. This enables customers 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.

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 some 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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