NEWS & INFORMATION

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ATTENTION Low-Income Heating Customers: Avoid spring utility disconnection

Iowa residential natural gas and electric customers who have been protected from credit disconnection of heating service because of Iowa's Winter Moratorium Law have about a month to pay or to make arrangements to pay heating bills that may have accumulated this winter. Beginning April 2, they may become subject to service disconnection. This wintertime disconnection protection extends only to households that qualified for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

Customers concerned about their ability to pay outstanding utility balances before the end of the moratorium should contact their energy utility immediately to see what options may be available to help them. Each customer's circumstances may differ, but utilities can often help by offering payment agreements to those who seek assistance and qualify. The telephone number of the local utility should be located on monthly bills.

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. Some local Community Action Program (CAP) agencies may still have assistance funds available. In some communities, other social service or church organizations might also help.

The Iowa Utilities Board always 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. Their LIHEAP assistance funds help to offset the utility account balance, but don't usually cover the entire winter heating bill.

Utilities may also provide long-term help to customers by enrolling them in a yearlong level-payment or budget-billing program. This spreads bill payment amounts over time. Customers not already enrolled in a level-payment plan could eliminate monthly bill surprises and improve their bill planning.

Customers should also continue to take all possible steps to use energy wisely. Save money by 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 with this. Another inexpensive and effective energy efficiency measure is to seal outside air leaks around windows and doors.

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