



NEWS & INFORMATION

350 Maple Street • Des Moines, Iowa 50319 • 515.281.5979

Rob Berntsen, Chair

Krista Tanner, Board member

Darrell Hanson, Board member

February 26, 2010

For Immediate Release

4-10

Contact: Rob Hillesland 515.281.3551

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

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

ATTENTION Low-income heating customers: Avoid spring utility disconnection

Many Iowa residential natural gas and electric customers have been protected from credit disconnection of heating service this winter because of Iowa's Winter Moratorium Law. But beginning April 2, those moratorium customers with unpaid utility bills may become subject to service disconnection.

Iowa's wintertime disconnection protection extends only to households that are qualified for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). Iowa's moratorium on service disconnection for these households runs from November 1 through April 1, so any of these customers having unpaid utility bills that accumulated this winter now have just over a month to pay or make arrangements with their utility to pay them.

LIHEAP customers concerned about their ability to pay outstanding utility balances before April 2 should contact their 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.

Low-income customers who have exhausted their utility payment options may need to seek other assistance in their community. Some local Community Action Program (CAP) agencies may have other 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 is 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 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 measure is to seal any outside air leaks.

###