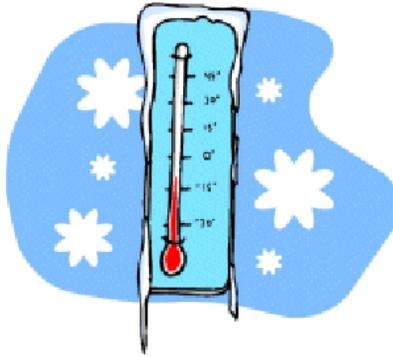


Customers Experiencing High Utility Bills



Many customers of Pacific Power and Portland General Electric have reported receiving higher than normal energy bills for December and January. Many have cited bills more than double the previous month, leading many to assume their utility must have received a very large rate increase. If you have received such a bill, your first course of action should be to call your utility or check your account on-line for information about your bill and usage.

While the two utilities did implement rate increases in January, they were very small (about .6%), impacting the average bill by about \$1.15, so we must look at other causes for the increased bills. The PUC has reviewed many high customer bills in the last two weeks and has determined the main factors leading to the increased bills likely are:

1. **Colder than normal weather:** Weather for December and January was significantly colder than it has been for the past two winters. In some areas, the average daily temperature for January was as much as 8 degrees colder than for the same period last year. Much colder weather has a significant impact on your energy consumption.
2. **Heating Systems:** The colder the weather, the more your heating system must operate to keep your house warm. Since your heating system is the single largest user of energy in most homes, colder than normal weather will have a significant impact on energy consumption. Even if the thermostat is not turned up, the heating system will run more to keep up with the increased heat loss of the home. Homes with heat pumps are particularly susceptible to extreme cold as their efficiency is greatly reduced when temperatures drop below about 35 degrees.
3. **Water Heating:** Unusually cold weather also affects the temperature of the water coming into your water heater, leading to higher energy usage as the water heater must work harder to heat the water.
4. **Home All Day:** During the extremely cold weather many schools cancelled classes and many adults were unable to go to work, causing children and adults to be home all day when they normally would not be. This will lead to increased energy use for heating systems, water heating, electronics usage, lighting, etc.
5. **Extra Days in Billing Period:** Due to the severe weather, in some areas meter readers were often delayed in reading meters, in many cases more than six days. This resulted in many bills that covered a much longer billing period than normal. Instead of the normal four week bill, many

received bills covering more than five weeks. This will correct itself with a return to a normal meter reading cycle.

6. **Estimated Bills:** In some areas, some meters were not read at all, so the utility was allowed to estimate those bills. If your bill was estimated, the utility is required to clearly note this on your bill. Sometimes these estimates do not accurately reflect actual usage. However, if a bill was estimated higher than it should have been, this will automatically correct the next month when the meter is actually read again.
7. **Prior Arrears:** If customers did not pay their bill in full the prior month, there will be a carryover amount due that is added to the unusually high bill causing the bill to be even higher.
8. **Holiday Usage Increase:** Many of the unusually high bills currently being received cover the period of the holidays. Energy usage during the holidays usually increases because there are an increased number of people in homes, increased cooking, laundry, Christmas lights, etc.

Any or all of these factors may have combined to cause unusually high energy bills. If customers are unable to pay their bill in full this month, they should contact their utility to make special payment arrangements.

The following energy conservation tips may help reduce your energy consumption;

1. Reduce Thermostat Setting – A good rule of thumb, for each 1 degree your thermostat is lowered, it may lower the heating portion of your bill by 3%.
2. Close off unused rooms, turn off unused heaters – If you have electric baseboard or wall heaters in back rooms or outbuildings where you do not need to heat, these should be turned off at the circuit breakers. Turning the thermostat to LOW will not necessarily turn the heater off - it can still operate when temperatures get cold enough.
3. Set water heater to 130 degrees.
4. Wash clothes in cold water – reduced hot water usage will help lower your bill.
5. Seal up air leaks around your doors and windows.
6. Install a programmable thermostat – can reduce energy usage up to 10%.
7. Replace furnace filters – Dirty filters cause increased energy use.
8. Air dry dishes instead of using your dishwasher's drying cycle.
9. Unplug appliances and electronic devices - All electronic devices and appliances not in regular use should be unplugged as many of these use a small amount of energy, even when not in use.
10. Replace incandescent lights bulbs with high efficiency LED bulbs will significantly reduce the lighting portion of your bill.
11. Engine Block Heaters – Use of an engine block heater (for diesel vehicles) will cause increased energy usage as this is an electric resistance heater.
12. Stock Tank Heaters – If you have stock tank heaters for your livestock, these are electric resistance heaters which will run constantly unless they are equipped with a thermostat.
13. Pump House Heaters – if you have well water and keep an electric heater in the pump house, use of a heat lamp on the pump will reduce usage.

If you heat your home with electricity or natural gas through Portland General Electric, Pacific Power, NW Natural, Cascade Natural, or Avista, you may call Energy Trust of Oregon at 1.866.368.7878 to learn about available cash incentives and services. You can also visit their website at <https://www.energytrust.org/residential/evaluate-your-home/> to complete a no-cost online evaluation of your home's energy use and learn about opportunities for energy efficient improvements. Customers of Idaho Power may call their utility to request similar energy conservation assistance.