

Preparing for high natural gas bills

Over the last several months, wholesale natural gas prices have increased significantly across the country. Increases in the price of the natural gas that we purchase from suppliers can dramatically increase your bill because about 70-80 percent of your bill is made up of the cost of natural gas. **You should expect to see significantly higher natural gas bills this winter, perhaps as much as 45 percent higher, as a result.** CenterPoint Energy bills customers the actual cost we incur for natural gas with no mark-up.

As always, using less energy is the best way for customers to manage their natural gas bill. Even simple, inexpensive efforts can add up to large savings. See tips at right.

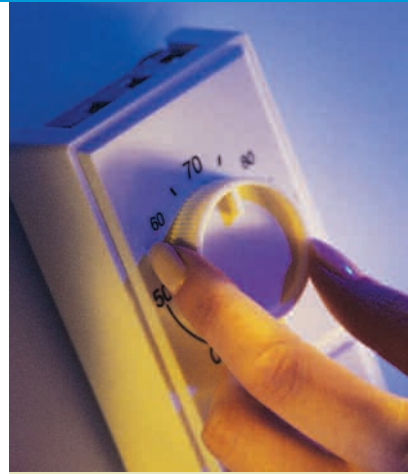
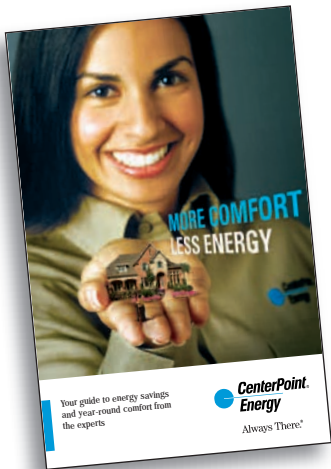
Helpful resources and programs More about the following can be found at CenterPointEnergy.com/readyforwinter:

- **Level billing options** – Average Monthly Billing (Budget Plan in Minnesota) spreads costs more evenly over the year. Customers can enroll online.
- **Energy-saving information** – Steps like lowering the thermostat to 68 degrees or lower and adding layers of clothes can increase comfort and save energy. More tips, free publications, information about weatherizing, an operating cost calculator and more are available.
- **Payment assistance** – For customers concerned about paying their bill, there are links and information to programs that can help.
- **Gas usage information** – Customers can view their monthly usage anytime by registering in *My Account Online*. Customers' bills also show just above the pay stub the average daily temperature and average daily gas use for the billing period compared to the same period last year.

- **Natural gas pricing** – Learn about the factors that influence natural gas prices.

Despite higher prices, efficient natural gas remains the best energy value. See right and visit CenterPointEnergy.com/gasisbetter:

Energy-saving tips are available in More Comfort, Less Energy, a free publication available for downloading anytime at CenterPointEnergy.com/readyforwinter. First select a region, then click on the Managing Energy Costs quick link.



Lowering the thermostat 10 – 15 percent for eight hours a day can help save up to 10 percent a year on heating costs. Installing a programmable thermostat helps automatically control heat use.

Energy-saving tips

- **Reduce water heating costs up to 10 percent by lowering the water heater temperature to 120 degrees from 140 degrees and wrapping water heater pipes.**
- **Check furnace filter monthly and change when dirty.**
- **Seal and caulk windows and doors to save as much as 10 percent on energy costs.**
- **Run your washing machine, dish washer and gas dryer only with full loads.**

Natural gas: a great value

Even when prices are higher, natural gas remains the best energy value. It is the most efficient and cost-effective energy source for heating homes and water. It also provides more comfort and helps customers lower their carbon footprint.

Energy Source	\$ per Therm/ Ccf*
Natural gas	\$1.328
Electricity	\$3.165
Propane	\$2.650
No. 2 heating oil	\$2.300

Source: U.S. Department of Energy



Scratch and Sniff

What to do if you smell natural gas

Natural gas has no odor so CenterPoint Energy adds a harmless, unpleasant-smelling odorant so you can recognize it. Scratch the flame above to become familiar with the smell.

If you smell natural gas inside your home or building:

Step 1: Leave immediately! Do not use electric switches, telephones (or cell phones) or anything that may cause a spark.

Step 2: Go to a safe location in a nearby home or building. Then, call 612-372-5050 in the Minneapolis/St. Paul Area or toll-free 1-800-722-9326. Then call 911. Never assume someone else has reported the gas leak. Alert your neighbors. Remember, CenterPoint Energy checks suspected natural gas leaks at no cost to you.

Step 3: Never try to repair a gas leak yourself. Leave all repairs to a professional.

Preventing CO buildup

- Never operate an automobile, lawn mower or any combustion engine, grill or similar equipment in an enclosed area such as your home, garage, a tent, trailer or fish house, even with the door open.
- Never leave a fire smoldering in your fireplace.
- Have fuel-burning equipment regularly inspected by a qualified technician.
- Never try to heat a room with a gas range, oven or portable fuel-burning heater.

Home Energy Audits reveal ways to save

CenterPoint Energy offers two types of Home Energy Audits that uncover low-cost and no-cost steps customers can take to save energy and money.

A Standard Energy Audit is available for \$25. (For some income levels, the fee is waived.) A more in-depth Home Performance Audit is also available, for \$100.

In a Standard Energy Audit, a state-certified auditor will visit to:

- Check windows, doors and insulation
- Review heating and cooling equipment
- Provide a report and many valuable, energy-saving ideas
- Provide up to \$25 worth of basic weatherization materials at no extra charge

The Home Performance Audit includes all of the above, plus three high-tech tests to help uncover more energy-saving opportunities. Request an audit or learn more at 612-321-5011 or 1-800-234-5800, ext. 5011. Or visit CenterPointEnergy.com/energyaudit. •



Customers appreciate the energy-saving advice they receive during a Home Energy Audit. Shown above is a blower door test, one of several high-tech components of the more in-depth audit.

Carbon monoxide safety

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a poisonous, colorless, odorless, tasteless, nonirritating gas which, when breathed into the body, combines with the blood and prevents it from absorbing oxygen, which can cause illness or death. CO usually is produced while burning fuels such as gasoline, coal, wood, charcoal, kerosene, natural gas, propane, heating oil, and almost any other combustible material. Improperly adjusted or poorly maintained fuel-burning equipment and appliances can cause dangerous levels of CO to accumulate. There is an even greater risk of CO accumulation if the home is tightly sealed and not properly ventilated.

CO alarms required by law

Many Minnesotans are already required to have a CO alarm installed in their home within 10 feet of each bedroom under a new Minnesota statute. The statute has been in effect since January 2007 for all new construction single- and multi-family homes and effective August 1 for existing single-family homes. It will take effect August 1, 2009, for all multi-family homes, such as townhomes, apartment buildings, etc. See left for ways to help prevent CO buildup and visit CenterPointEnergy.com for more. •

Visit CenterPointEnergy.com/besafe for more natural gas safety information.

Editor's note: In July, some customers received another state's issue of TouchPoint. Any information they missed will be included in a future edition.



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