

Energy issues

energy + time

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September-October 2004



Heating Season Check List

Washington Gas makes every effort to purchase affordable natural gas for its customers and is on schedule to meet gas storage levels to provide reliable supplies this winter. Energy analysts expect a continued tightening of natural gas supplies across the U.S. that can cause price fluctuations – especially during times of peak demand.

✓ Join the Budget Plan

One way to reduce the impact of higher energy costs is to budget for them. The Washington Gas **Budget Plan** spreads the cost of winter heating over the entire year and provides greater certainty about the monthly payments. We calculate your average monthly payment based on historical natural gas usage – adjusted for normal weather – and projected gas costs. Periodically, we review your account to determine that our monthly estimate is on target.

If actual gas costs, weather and/or usage differ significantly from our original estimate, an adjustment in your monthly budget payment may be necessary to prevent a large correction at the end of your budget year. You also may request an adjustment. If your monthly budget payment amount changes, a message will be printed on your bill.

The Budget Plan is designed as a 12-month program, and we encourage you to stay on it year-round to realize the potential benefits. For more information or to enroll, visit www.washingtongas.com, click on *Customer Service*, and *Budget Plan*, or call the automated **Special Services Line** at (703) 750-7944. Have your Washington Gas account number available. **Frederick County customers should call (301) 662-2151.** (Note: Please call us if you choose to purchase natural gas from an energy supply company and you want to participate in the Budget Plan.)

✓ Schedule a Heating Equipment Inspection

For energy efficiency and safety, have a qualified, licensed heating professional perform an **annual inspection** and maintenance of your natural gas heating equipment before the first cold snap. This service also should include your water heater and should cover inspection of all pilots, burner chambers, venting systems and thermostats. The heating system air filter should be cleaned or changed, and all



chimneys, flues and vents should be checked to make sure they are clear and in proper operating condition.

✓ Explore Energy Efficiency Resources

Energy efficiency improvements can make your home more comfortable, save you money, and reduce pollution. Check these sources for more information:

www.washingtongas.com: Click on *Energy Information* to download our newest brochure, *Understanding and Managing Your Energy Costs*, or *Energy Insights*, a guide to winter preparedness. You'll find an activity sheet for the younger ones under *Energy Efficiency for Children*, and a video that provides step-by-step instructions for weatherizing your home. Call (703) 750-1000 if you need copies of our energy brochures.

www.eere.energy.gov/consumerinfo: This is the U.S. Department of Energy's Web site that includes information for homeowners, renters and businesses. Click on *Energy Saving Tips*. Call the Department of Energy's **Information Center** at 1-877-337-3463 to obtain helpful fact sheets.

www.ase.org: The Alliance to Save Energy provides an excellent and easy-to-navigate site with helpful energy efficiency information, or call (202) 857-0666. ©



Energy Assistance

Qualifying Maryland Residents


Maryland Energy Assistance Program (MEAP): Assists qualifying customers in paying winter heating bills. Grants are based on family size, income and type of fuel used for heating.

Utility Service Protection Program: Residential customers eligible for assistance from MEAP also are eligible for this program. Customers receive a natural gas bill for the same amount each month throughout the year. Payment plans depend on natural gas usage from the previous year and the outstanding balance owed on a customer's gas bill. The program begins the first week in November, and customers must complete applications for MEAP in their county.

Residential Essential Service Pilot Program: MEAP-eligible residents who use natural gas for home heating and who are

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Energy Assistance continued...

current on their natural gas utility payments may be eligible to receive a discount on a portion of their Washington Gas bills during the November 2004 – April 2005 heating season. The discount could be worth up to \$135. 

Weatherization Assistance: Provides home weatherization services such as weather-stripping, caulking and plastic window covering at no cost to eligible families.

For more information on these programs, contact the Maryland Department of Human Resources **Energy Hotline** at 1-800-352-1446, or visit www.dhr.state.md.us/meap.

Washington Area Fuel Fund

The Washington Area Fuel Fund (WAFF) was founded by Washington Gas more than 20 years ago and is administered by The Salvation Army. It pays for all types of fuel to heat the homes of those most in need. Funds are available January through May of each year. 

Washington Gas pays the administrative fees so that 100% of customers' contributions go directly to provide assistance to eligible area residents. Please consider giving the gift of warmth by pledging a monthly amount or making a one-time donation on your gas bill. Contribute when you pay your bill on line or by phone at (703) 750-7944. Look for the special contribution form in October's bill. For more information or to ask about assistance, please call 1-888-318-WAFF (318-9233). ☺

Washington Gas's Frederick County, Maryland customers should call (301) 662-2151 for information related to energy assistance, billing, payment plans, safety and other customer services. ☺

Customer Choice 

Did you know you that approximately 90,000 Maryland residential and commercial Washington Gas customers choose to buy natural gas from energy suppliers? These businesses compete to sell you energy and could save you money on your natural gas purchases. You'll need to shop and compare their prices and services. No matter which company sells you natural gas, Washington Gas will continue to deliver it – safely and reliably – and respond to natural gas emergencies 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Visit our Web site or the Maryland Public Service Commission site at www.psc.state.md.us. Call Washington Gas at (703) 750-1000 or the Commission at 1-800-492-0474.

In response to state regulations, unless you exercise your right to “opt out,” Washington Gas and other utilities provide customer information (name, address and telephone number) to licensed energy suppliers. As a result, suppliers may contact customers with information that can help them make informed energy decisions.

Customers who wish to be excluded from the list or want their name added back can call (703) 750-4504, or 1-800-660-7899, Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., from September 8, 2004, through October 20, 2004, the last date to respond. Hearing impaired customers may reach Washington Gas through the nationally-recognized relay service number, 711. **Frederick County customers should call (301) 662-2151.** ☺

Carbon Monoxide 

The U. S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) recommends that you install Carbon Monoxide (CO) alarms in the hallways of your home – near every separate sleeping area. Make sure furniture or draperies don't cover or block the alarm. Replace batteries at least twice each year, and change the batteries in your smoke alarms too. 

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless, toxic gas created when fossil fuels are not burned completely. Many CO-related incidents involve car exhausts, but some are caused by blocked furnace/boiler vents and chimneys or by improperly adjusted or inadequately maintained appliances. The CPSC says that a carbon monoxide alarm can provide added protection but is no substitute for proper use and upkeep of appliances that can produce CO.

Warning signs of CO in your home can include stuffy, stale air; condensation on windows; back drafts from a fireplace, furnace or water-heating chimney; yellow burner flames (except from natural gas fireplaces or logs); or burner flames or pilot lights that flutter or keep going out. Soot or a lingering pungent odor around appliances are other warning signs. If you notice any of these, turn off the equipment immediately and introduce fresh air to the building. Call a qualified natural gas contractor to inspect the equipment as soon as possible.

Physical symptoms of CO poisoning can include dizziness, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, headaches, ringing in the ears, blurred vision, stinging eyes and fainting. If you experience these symptoms and suspect CO, seek fresh air by leaving the building immediately and call 911 from a neighbor's house. ☺