

The Commission met on **Thursday, January 13, 2005**, with Chairperson Koppendray and Commissioners Johnson, Nickolai, Pugh, and Reha present.

Comment [COMMENT1]: Minutes by Peter Brown, Eric Witte and Ann Pollack. 1 motion was made.

Before considering items on the Energy Agenda, the Commission considered items on the meeting's Telecommunications Agenda.

ENERGY AGENDA

G-008/CI-04-2001

In the Matter of CenterPoint Energy's Implementation of the Cold Weather Rule and Reconnection Policies

Commissioner Nickolai moved that the Commission

1. approve an agreement between CenterPoint Energy, the Office of the Attorney General and the Commission's Consumer Affairs Office as follows:
 - a. CenterPoint Energy will staff its Customer Service Office from 7:00 AM to 10:00 PM beginning Friday January 14, 2005 through Sunday January 16, 2004;
 - b. CenterPoint Energy Customer Service representatives contacted by or contacting customers seeking reconnection will use the following script:

When a customer calls to reconnect on or after October 15, the customer service representative shall state as follows:

FIRST STEP

Rep: The purpose of this conversation is to see how we can get you reconnected. Before we discuss the specifics, you should know that the State of Minnesota has a Cold Weather Rule that protects its citizens from loss of heat in the winter if they are unable to pay their utility bills. The rule is in effect from October 15 to April 15.

Under the Cold Weather Rule, a customer who is unable to pay the whole bill has a right to negotiate a payment plan to be reconnected. If the utility and the customer do not reach an agreement on a payment plan, the customer has a right to appeal the matter to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission. After you are reconnected, if you are unable to make payments on time you must contact the utility immediately and renegotiate the payment plan or you may be shut off.

SECOND STEP

Rep: Would you like to negotiate a payment plan?

If yes: The Minnesota Cold Weather Rule has a provision relating to households whose income is less than half of the state average. If your monthly household income meets these guidelines, your natural gas service will be reconnected if you agree to pay as much as you can but no more than 10% of your monthly household income.

No matter what your income is, you still have a right to negotiate a payment plan with the utility if you are unable to pay your bill.

Could you answer a couple questions so I can make an initial determination as to whether you qualify as a

household within the Cold Weather Rule income guidelines (customer service representative must refer to table)

If yes:

- What is your monthly household income?
- How many people live in your household?

If the customer's stated income is within the Cold Weather Rule guidelines, the customer service representative will state the following:

- Based on this income information, we can reconnect your service and set you up on a reconnection plan while we verify your income. Under a reconnection plan, you are not required to pay more than [10% of the monthly customer's income].

- What can you afford to pay a month?

- If CPE agrees to this amount, customer service representative sets up an appointment for reconnection and will go through the process for verifying income and reconnecting.

- If CPE does not agree, the customer service representative may negotiate but may NOT request an amount of more than 10% of the customer's monthly income. If CPE and the customer reach agreement, the customer service representative sets up an appointment for reconnection and will go through process for verifying income and reconnecting.

- The customer service representative will also inform the customer that funds may be available to help the customer pay his or her bill and give the customer the agency contact information.

If NO or if the customer's monthly income is more than or equal to 50% of the state median, the customer service representative will ask the following questions:

- Are you able to pay your existing bill in full?
- If no: What type of payment plan is workable for you to pay off your bill?

If the customer and company are able to agree on a payment plan, then the customer service representative sets up an appointment for reconnection and will go through the process for reconnecting.

THIRD STEP

In any case where CPE and the customer are unable to reach an agreement, the customer service representative will inform the customer, at the time of the request, how to appeal to the Public Utilities Commission and CPE will send out an appeal notice to the customer. If the customer appeals to the Public Utilities Commission, the customer's service will be reconnected pending the outcome of the appeal.

FOURTH STEP

Rep: Thank you for your call. If you have any questions about the information I provided in this call or your rights under the Cold Weather Rule, please contact the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission at 1-800-657-3782 or 651-296-0406 or the Minnesota Attorney General's Office at 1-800-657-3787 or 651-296-3353.

- c. by 10:00 PM Sunday January 16, 2005, CenterPoint Energy employees will make a site visit to each of the 350 customer residences that the Company has identified as remaining disconnected and not vacant and explain (as described in the script) the Company's intent and process to reconnect;
- d. if a customer contacting or contacted by CenterPoint Energy employees wants to be reconnected and agrees to a payment plan as outlined in the Cold Weather Rule as described in the script, the Company will reconnect the customer within 12 hours of the customer's agreement to such a payment plan, leaving income verification to be confirmed subsequently in the normal course of business; and
- e. if the CenterPoint Energy employee visiting the customer's residence is unable to speak with the customer, the CenterPoint Energy employee will leave a Cold

Weather Rule Information Packet headed by a prominent one-page flyer conveying (consistent with the requirements stated in the script) the Company's intent and process to reconnect the customer's gas service;

- f. not in lieu of but in addition to the weekly e-mailed progress report required by the Commission's January 4, 2005 Order in this matter, CenterPoint Energy will contact the Commission and the Office of the Attorney General Tuesday morning January 18, 2005 with an update regarding the progress made as a result of this Agreement; and
2. appoint Commissioner Phyllis Reha as the lead Commissioner on this investigation with authority to receive and decide discovery questions (production of documents, witnesses, etc.) raised in the course of this investigation;.

The motion passed 5-0.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Approved by the Commission, January 26, 2005; approval attested to by Burl W. Haar, Executive Secretary.