



# NEWS RELEASE

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## **Customers can seek protection under the Cold Weather Rule; Low-income Minnesotans can apply for heating assistance**

*As heating season nears, contact your utility to avoid disconnection*

SAINT PAUL, MN—With cold weather just around the corner, the Minnesota Department of Commerce and the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC) encourage Minnesotans to contact their utilities now to learn more about the Cold Weather Rule protection to keep homes heated all winter long.

Minnesota's Cold Weather Rule takes effect on October 15 and protects residential utility customers from having their heat shut off through April 15, 2014. But to prevent heating disconnection, customers must contact their utility to establish and maintain a monthly payment plan.

### **Minnesota's Energy Assistance Program**

To help pay home heating costs, Minnesota offers the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, known as LIHEAP or the Energy Assistance Program (EAP). The Minnesota Department of Commerce administers LIHEAP in partnership with 32 local service providers throughout the state. LIHEAP is federally funded through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The program helps renters and homeowners earning less than 50 percent of the state's median income (\$43,642 for a family of four) obtain grant money to help pay their heating bills.

The average annual grant per household last year was \$500. Households with seniors, people with disabilities, veterans, and children are especially encouraged to apply. Applications were recently sent to households that qualified for energy assistance last year; others who may qualify are encouraged to apply. To apply, contact the local service provider in your county by calling 1-800-657-3710 or visit the [Energy Assistance Program section](#) on the Division of Energy Resources website <http://mn.gov/commerce/energy>.

"Many Minnesota families struggle financially with heating costs each winter," said Commerce Commissioner Mike Rothman. "Our Energy Assistance Program serves as a safety net offering financial assistance to low-income Minnesotans, particularly households with seniors, children, disabled persons, and veterans. Having a warm home is a basic necessity, and no Minnesotan should be left out in the cold."

The Minnesota Department of Commerce also administers the [Weatherization Assistance Program](#), a companion program of EAP. The program provides cost-effective energy conservation measures to reduce energy costs for low-income households. Minnesotans who meet the income guidelines for weatherization may receive weatherization services; they may also receive additional assistance from the utilities. Both homeowners and renters may apply for weatherization.

Other forms of assistance may be available through county social service programs, community-based organizations and nonprofit agencies. For a list of resources, visit the [Stay Warm Minnesota website](#).

### **Cold Weather Rule**

The Cold Weather Rule helps customers who heat their homes with natural gas or electricity to avoid shut-off

during the winter months. To be eligible, customers must contact their utility to work out a payment plan and must make the payments. Customers who have a combined household income at or below 50 percent of the state median income are not required to pay more than ten percent of household income; others are also eligible to negotiate a payment plan.

Households that need to re-connect for winter should contact their utility now to take advantage of the payments options.

More information on the Cold Weather Rule is available at the [PUC website](#) or by calling 651-296-0406 or 800-657-3782.

“The Cold Weather Rule is a safeguard for the most vulnerable Minnesotans during our frigid winters,” said PUC Chair Beverly Jones Heydinger. “It ensures that households in need are safe, warm, and healthy. By working out a payment plan with their utility, Minnesota families can keep the heat on while they face financial challenges.”

Minnesota consumers using delivered fuels such as fuel oil, propane, or wood to heat their homes are not covered by the Cold Weather Rule. However, they are also encouraged to contact the companies that serve them to discuss payment options if they are concerned about their ability to pay for fuel.

### **Energy-saving tips**

The Minnesota Department of Commerce, Division of Energy Resources provides a wide range of energy-saving information that every household can use to help control heating costs. Some basic no-cost and low-cost energy-saving recommendations include:

- Weather strip and caulk windows and doors to eliminate air infiltration.
- Cover drafty windows with tightly sealed plastic to keep the warm air in.
- Open curtains and blinds on south-facing windows to let the sun in during the day to naturally heat your home.
- Seal air leaks to prevent cold air infiltration through chimneys, vents, pipes, and wires that penetrate walls, ceilings and attics.
- Close your fireplace damper when a fire is not in use to prevent warm air from escaping.
- Maintain your heating system. Have annual furnace or boiler inspections, clean or replace furnace filters regularly, and consider replacing old heating systems with more efficient ENERGY STAR<sup>®</sup> models.
- Use a programmable thermostat. Set your thermostat to automatically turn down the heat at night and when you're not at home.

More energy-saving tips can be found at [www.energysavers.gov](http://www.energysavers.gov). For more information on energy efficiency and energy conservation, visit the Commerce Department website and check out two consumer [energy guides](#): *Home Envelope and Appliances, Lighting, Electronics*.