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Community News

Put safety on top of holiday to-do list



By Eric Winslow
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Many of us put a lot of time and energy into making the holidays special for our loved ones and friends.

In all the hustle and bustle of the season, please remember to put safety at the top of your holiday to-do list.

Here are a few suggestions to help ensure your family has a safe holiday season:

- When decorating outdoors, stay away from overhead power lines, as well as the electric service line coming into your home.

- Be sure to inspect your electrical decorations for cracked, frayed or bare wires or loose connections to reduce the chance of electric shock or fire.

- Use no more than three standard-size sets of lights per extension cord. Overloaded extension cords can overheat and start a fire. Also be sure to keep all outdoor extension cords and light strings free of snow and water and protected from the elements.

All those lights we string inside and outside our homes not only add magic

and beauty to the holiday season, they also add to your electric bill. Considering the cost of energy these days, it's more important than ever to be sure to turn off your Christmas lights overnight and when you're away from home. Automatic timers work great for that.

If you are really serious about conserving energy this holiday season, consider switching to LED Christmas lights, which use 90 percent less energy than incandescent bulbs. While more expensive than traditional holiday light strands, they will pay for themselves in energy savings over the course of several holiday seasons.

LED Christmas lights also offer much deeper colors than traditional bulbs, are cool to the touch and have a bulb life of 50,000 hours or more. That means you'll be spending less time trying to pinpoint the burned-out bulb on your light strand; so you'll have more time for holiday shopping, decorating, baking....

Speaking of holiday shopping, gift certificates from Citizens' Electric make an ideal gift for those hard-to-buy-for relatives or a neighbor who is struggling to keep up with his or her electric bill. You don't even have to wrap them. Just stop by the office to purchase one, and we'll take care of the rest.

Here's wishing you and yours warm wishes for a safe and happy holiday season.

Please give to \$1 Energy Fund

Consider signing up for Citizens' Electric's \$1 Energy Fund. By simply adding one dollar to your monthly electric bill, you can help neighbors right here in the Buffalo Valley.

Your donations are matched by Citizens' Electric. This means that every \$1 donated becomes \$2, and 100 percent of those contributions are used to provide energy assistance grants to needy families in Citizens' territory.

To participate, simply designate your tax-deductible contribution amount on the return stub of this month's electric bill. You may stop your donation at any time simply by notifying us in writing.



Need help paying your heating bills?

If you need help paying your heating bills this winter, you may be able to receive assistance through the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

Qualifying families can receive cash grants to help pay heating bills. Crisis grants are available to those who have an emergency that causes them to be in danger of being without heat. Emergency situations include having broken heating equipment, running out of heating fuel or receiving notice of termination from your utility.

Families may apply for energy assistance through LIHEAP until March 21. Acceptance in the program is based on income and household size.

For more information contact the Union County Assistance Office at (570) 524-2201.

New rates take effect in 2008

Citizens' Electric will institute a new generation rate for all customers and rate classes beginning Jan. 1, 2008.

The new generation rate of 7.9028 cents per kilowatt-hour (kWh) will increase the monthly bill of a residential customer using 500 kWh of electricity by \$13.35, or approximately 34.8 percent.

Even with the increase, Citizens' Electric's generation rate will remain well below other Pennsylvania utilities that no longer operate under state-imposed rate caps. Generation rates for those utilities, including UGI, Pike Power and Penn Power, are in the range of 10 to 13 cents per kWh.

The increase is a reflection of today's electric generation market, which has been impacted by the dramatic rise in energy prices in recent years. The generation rate is a straight pass-through charge to consumers, and Citizens' Electric is not permitted to make a profit on it.

Citizens' long-term generation contract with Reliant Energy, which kept generation prices stable since 2004, expires Dec. 31.

Citizens' has contracted ACES Power Marketing to procure and manage its generation supply beginning Jan. 1. ACES will secure generation for Citizens' Electric at market prices from multiple electricity suppliers. The generation rate will be adjusted quarterly to reflect current market conditions, avoiding dramatic price swings inherent with long-term contracts.

A distribution rate increase is expected to be implemented Feb. 1, pending approval by the state Public Utility Commission.

Citizens' last increased its distribution rate, which covers costs associated with owning and maintaining the local electric system, 17 years ago. The increase is needed to cover increased operating expenses and to pay for utility plant upgrades that will increase reliability of the local electric system.

Customers enrolled in the company's budget billing program will see the new rates reflected in their budget billing amounts early in the new year.

Let budget billing even out payments

You can avoid seasonal fluctuations in your electric bill by participating in Citizens' Electric's budget billing plan.

Budget billing allows you to level out your monthly payments throughout the year, eliminating seasonal spikes as well as billing fluctuation caused by changes in your electric use. The plan is entirely voluntary and available to all customers on our residential rate schedule.

There is no cost to participate in the plan, nor are there any savings. It is simply a convenience that levels out your monthly electric bill throughout the year. Your payment amount is calculated based on the average of your electric bills for the previous 12 months and may be adjusted periodically to reflect changes in your electric use, weather and other factors.

If you are interested in setting up a budget billing plan for your account or to learn more about how the plan works, stop in our office or give us a call at (570) 524-2231.

Display sheds light on bulb efficiency

During December, we'll help shed some light on the energy-saving ability of those compact fluorescent lights (CFLs) that you've been hearing so much about.

Customers are invited to check out a display in our Lewisburg office that features a strip of four CFLs and a strip of four incandescent bulbs that run on separate electric meters. When both light strips are turned on, the meter for the incandescent bulbs spins about four times faster than the CFL meter. It is estimated that CFLs can save consumers more than \$30 in electric costs over the lifetime of one bulb.