

October 30, 2012

To our partners around Ohio:

The 2011-2012 winter heating season was, truly, one for the books, as last year marked the warmest winter in the 64 years Columbia Gas of Ohio has tracked temperatures. When partnered with decade low natural gas prices, many of our customers saw home heating bills that were extremely manageable.

This was great news for those struggling in difficult economic conditions. And while early projections for the 2012-2013 winter heating season call for a return to more normal temperatures, I'm happy to share that the low natural gas prices should help keep home heating bills manageable again this winter.

While natural gas costs remain low, a number that remains far too high is households that don't receive the heating assistance they qualify for. Census figures indicate that **nearly 32 percent of Ohioans – approximately 3.5 million – qualify for some form of energy assistance; yet fewer than half receive help**. This could be for any number of reasons: They weren't aware of available programs; their economic situation has changed and they didn't know that they may now qualify for help; or, they are unsure where to turn for help. Our hope is that, with your assistance, we can ensure these households find the help they need this winter.

In an effort to ensure that no one goes without heat this winter, we wanted to provide you some information as the 2012-2013 winter heating season approaches.

Natural Gas Costs

Several factors have contributed to help reduce the price of natural gas to near-decade lows, including: new production from large resources of natural gas in the continental United States, near-record gas storage levels, the tame 2011-2012 winter and a mild hurricane season. These factors provide a strong indication that natural gas prices should remain stable, with minimal possibility of a spike due to a cold snap, for the 2012-2013 winter heating season.

Winter Bill Projection

During the winter heating season, the cost of gas accounts for 72 percent of the average customer's bill. The previously mentioned good news – natural gas prices near decade lows – should help offset increased household consumption should temperatures return to more normal levels. Additionally, customers will benefit from our levelized gas distribution rate structure again this winter. Customers are no longer exposed to a volumetric gas delivery charge during winter months, when demand and consumption are at their highest levels. These factors should allow consumers to enjoy bills that are easier on their household budgets.

Assistance with Bills

While natural gas prices should remain low and stable for the foreseeable future, we still understand that many of our customers are struggling with their entire household budgets.

There are several programs and options to share, however the first suggestion for every situation is: **Contact Columbia Gas of Ohio at the first sign you may have trouble paying your bill.** The sooner we hear about an issue or problem, the more options we can provide for assistance.

Interrupting someone's service is always the last resort for Columbia Gas, and the company will work with customers to try to ensure service is not interrupted. Customers whose service is currently shut off, or those who are at risk to be shut off, should consider these options:

- **Payment Plans:** Any Columbia Gas of Ohio customer who feels that they might have a problem paying their winter heating bills should call 1-800-344-4077 for assistance in enrolling in a one-sixth, one-ninth or winter heating season payment plan that can make bills easier to handle.
- **Winter Reconnect Order:** Customers whose service is off for non-payment or who have received disconnection notices can take advantage of this service, mandated by the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio. No matter what amount is owed, service can be restored or maintained with a payment of \$175 plus a small reconnection fee. More information is available at: www.PUCO.ohio.gov, or by calling 1-800-686-7826.
- **Winter Crisis Program:** Beginning November 1, qualified low-income customers are eligible for the Emergency Home Energy Assistance Program, funds that can be used to pay the \$175 Winter Reconnect Order. For more information, call the Ohio Development Services Agency at 1-800-282-0880.
- **Percentage of Income Payment Plan Plus (PIPP Plus):** Households at or less than 150 percent of federal poverty guidelines may be eligible to pay just 6 percent of monthly income or \$10, whichever is greater, for their gas bill year-round. If you were previously a PIPP customer, a co-payment of up to your entire PIPP defaulted amount may be required for you to enroll in PIPP Plus. For more information, call the Ohio Development Services Agency at 1-800-282-0880.
- **Fuel Funds:** Columbia Gas of Ohio customers are encouraged to contact their local Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) agency to see if monies from the Fuel Funds program are still available. These funds are designated to assist households with incomes up to 175 and 200 percent of the federal poverty level and are available until they are exhausted.
- **Budget Payment Plan:** It's not too late for customers who are current on their bill to enroll in Columbia's Budget Payment Plan program, which spreads winter heating costs across the entire year. Enrollment options include: Enroll online at ColumbiaGasOhio.com - click on "Manage Your Account" and log in to enroll any time. Or call 1-800-344-4077 – select option 1 from the main menu and follow the appropriate prompts for information on the budget plan.
- **WarmChoice®:** Columbia Gas offers an energy inspection and no cost weatherization through its WarmChoice program for customers with household income at or below 150 percent of federal poverty guidelines. WarmChoice can reduce customer bills by an average of 30 percent. In addition, customers are left with safe gas heating equipment and a more comfortable home after weatherization is complete. For information go to ColumbiaGasOhio.com or contact the statewide referral service at 1-800-952-

3037 (**WarmChoice weatherization calls only, please**) to be directed to your local provider.

- **Home Performance Solutions:** The Home Performance Solutions program offers rebates of up to 70 percent on qualified energy-efficiency improvements that can reduce a home's annual energy consumption by 30 percent or more, saving up to \$6,000 on utility bills over the life of the improvements. The program starts with a low cost home energy audit, a \$500 value that costs only \$50. Columbia's rebates can be combined with Federal Energy Tax Credits, manufacturers' rebates and other incentives to reduce overall costs even more. To schedule an energy audit or obtain more information about the program, Columbia customers should call 1-877-644-6674.

Your Role as Our Partner

This winter heating season, we are asking you to help us in our efforts to reach out and help as many in need as possible. We are encouraging you to include this information in your outreach efforts or communications with constituents or residents. Additionally, we would welcome any and all opportunities within your community to share this information with individuals, organizations or at events you believe would have an impact. Enclosed you'll find some information regarding several Columbia Gas programs to reduce energy bills, information about payment assistance opportunities and income qualifications, winter safety tips and other valuable information. We'll be happy to provide you with additional copies if you'd like.

It is our commitment that no Columbia Gas customer goes without heat this winter. We will work with every household to find a way to ensure service, as we understand the economic climate has had a profound impact on many. We look forward to working with you in every effort to keep our customers and our community warm and safe this winter.