



CONNECTIONS

Winter 2006

published for the customers of Greenville Utilities



**Greenville
Utilities**

"Connections" is our customer newsletter, which we publish periodically to keep you informed about issues, activities and services at GUC.

If you have suggestions for topics or questions you'd like to see answered, please call our Public Information Office at 551-1522 or write to Connections, P.O. Box 1847, Greenville, NC 27835. www.guc.com

We look forward to hearing from you!

For Your Convenience

You can pay your bill using one of these methods:

- Online at www.guc.com
- By mail to: PO Box 1847, Greenville, NC 27835
- In person at our Main Office or GUC Express
- By EZ Pay, our automatic bank draft program
- At many local banks before the due date
- By credit card by calling: 1-800-722-8203

For more information, please call 551-3312.

GUC Announces Electric Rate Decrease

Greenville Utilities' Board of Commissioners approved an electric rate decrease at its meeting November 21, 2006. The decrease will be effective January 1, 2007.

"We are very pleased to announce a decrease for our customers," said Bryant Kittrell, GUC Board Chair. "During my eight-year tenure on the Board, this is the first time we have been able to decrease rates, and personally I am delighted."

"It's definitely a step in the right direction," said Ron Elks, GUC's General Manager/CEO. "We purchase electricity on behalf of our customers from the North Carolina Eastern Municipal Power Agency. The Power Agency has reduced our wholesale cost of power, and we are passing those savings on to our customers. For the past few years, the cost of wholesale power has gone up. This decrease, while modest, is welcome news."

As a result of the decrease, GUC's residential electric customers (with load management) using 1,000 kWh will be paying \$98.91 on their monthly utility bills for December through March. Without the decrease, they would be paying \$100.12 for that amount of electricity. Those same customers will pay \$109.48 for 1,000 kWh on bills for April through November. At the current rate, they would pay \$110.69.

"Essentially, we are tracking our costs right through to the customers," said Elks. "The same

principle is applied when we have a wholesale increase. With an increase, we change our retail pricing only enough to recover the increased costs. We don't keep any of the additional money. We also don't pass on every increase automatically. GUC first tries to absorb as much as possible. Since 2002, our wholesale costs have increased 21%, and we have absorbed \$3.3 million. That's over \$3 million we've saved our customers in potential cost increases."

GUC has offset past increases through cost-saving measures such as Beat-the-Peak, industrial generation, use of a rate stabilization fund, and other cost-containment measures.

"When we simply cannot absorb an increase, we must pass it on to our customers," said Elks. "In this case, our wholesale costs are decreasing. Rather than 'absorbing' the savings, we are passing them on to our customers."

According to Ken Raber, Senior Vice President for the NC Eastern Municipal Power Agency, the wholesale rate was decreased because the Power Agency had a good operating experience last year. "Reserve levels were acceptable for the agency to have stability and financial flexibility to absorb small changes in the marketplace," he said. "We see the rate remaining stable through 2010 pending any unforeseen changes in the marketplace or any significant changes in operations that affect our power plants."

Heating Season Energy Tips

There are a number of things we all can do to reduce energy usage and lower bills as much as possible during the heating season.



- Check and clean or replace your central heating filter(s) once each month. Keeping clean filters in the system can save as much as 10-15% of the operating costs.
- For all heating systems - every degree you lower the thermostat below 68, can save you around 7% (per degree) of the operating costs. Every degree above 68 degrees will increase your costs by about 7% per degree.
- If you have a heat pump with auxiliary electric heat “strips,” do not adjust the thermostat daily. Find your lowest comfortable setting and set it and forget it. The Department of Energy recommends 68 degrees or lower.
- Weather-seal window air conditioners for better efficiency. When possible, remove them in the winter, or at least cover to prevent cold air transfer.
- In the winter, turn the thermostat down anytime you are leaving for more than two hours. (This is not true for heat pumps with auxiliary heat “strips.” Leave it alone unless you are leaving for more than two days.)
- A central, forced air heating system operates more efficiently if you keep the pathway between the supply and return vents open and clear. Do not close off rooms which you are not using, and do not close or block off any registers.

Help Prevent Natural Gas Pipeline Emergencies

Though natural gas pipeline incidents are uncommon, you should know their signs:

- **LOOK.** Blowing dirt, bubbling creeks or ponds, dry spots in moist areas or dead plants surrounded by live, green plants may indicate a natural gas leak.
- **LISTEN.** Near a gas appliance or line, there may be a hissing sound when natural gas is leaking.
- **SMELL.** Stay alert for the distinctive, rotten-egg-like smell of natural gas. You should take action anytime you detect even a small amount of this odor in the air.

If you suspect a natural gas leak, take action!

- **LEAVE.** If you ever detect a natural gas leak, LEAVE IMMEDIATELY. Don't try to find or stop the leak.
- **DO NOT TOUCH** anything electrical before you leave or use a telephone, even a cell phone. Do not smoke, turn appliances or lights on or off, or operate any vehicle or equipment that could create a spark.
- **CALL.** Once you are out of the suspected area, immediately call our 24-hour Emergency Hotline at 551-1567 or 752-5627. If the smell of gas is particularly strong, you may also call 911.

Myth Busters: Holiday Lights

Myth: "My utility bill is always so much higher at Christmastime. It's those Christmas lights. They really run up my bill."

For the typical customer, this isn't true. In fact, if your bill is higher, it may be due to a variety of factors. Dropping temperatures are usually the biggest contributor; colder temperatures mean heating systems have to work harder to keep your home warm and cozy. During the holiday season, many people do more entertaining and cooking. Visiting friends and family also increases how much hot water is used for showers, etc. These factors contribute more to potentially-higher bills than twinkling lights.

Here's how much those decorations really cost: It costs eighty-seven cents to run one strand of 100-light (24 Watt) mini-lights for 12 hours a day for 30 days. The typical family may use eight of those 100-light strands

(800 lights) in their decorating. If they have the lights on 12 hours a day for 30 days, the cost would be \$6.98. If you decorate like the Griswold family in the movie *Christmas Vacation*, you'll spend a bit more. Fifty strands (5,000) lights will cost \$43.63 if they're on 12 hours a day for 30 days.

New LED (Light Emitting Diode) lights are more economical. Using the same examples as above, one strand would cost just thirty-five cents; eight strands would be \$2.72. The Griswold's would save money – fifty strands would be \$17.00.

So if you're concerned about the cost of using those Christmas lights, relax and decorate to your heart's content! Best wishes for a happy holiday season!

Credit Card Payments

Beginning January 2, 2007, NCO Financial Services will handle all GUC credit and debit card payments either by phone (1-800-722-8203) or at our website www.guc.com.

If you come to our Main Office or GUC Express to make a credit card payment, for your convenience, telephone pay stations with a direct line to NCO will be located in both lobbies.

NCO charges a convenience fee of \$3.95 per payment up to \$500. For amounts over \$500, a \$3.95 charge will apply to each \$500 increment. Please be aware that Greenville Utilities does not receive any of the convenience fees charged by NCO. These are merchant fees charged by banks to help defray the transaction processing costs along with the costs of extending credit.

Stroke Awareness

Holidays are a time for celebration. But, it's also a time when stroke risk factors may get out of control.

Stroke, or brain attack, is the third leading cause of death and one of the leading causes of adult disability in America. Eastern North Carolina is considered to be in the buckle of the "stroke belt."

Stroke risk factors include high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, smoking, alcohol and stress. It is important to manage these risk factors by medication and exercise, and moderation in alcohol intake, smoking and diet. The good news is that up to

80 percent of strokes are preventable. Recognizing when stroke is occurring and reacting quickly to get lifesaving treatment can help save lives. If you understand the warning signs and get to the hospital quickly, it is possible to even reverse the stroke itself. Many stroke patients have no idea they are having a stroke because brain cells are dying which can affect judgment.

Learning to recognize a stroke is important and easy – just think F.A.S.T.

Face: Ask the person to smile. Does one side of the face droop?

Arms: Ask the person to hold both arms up evenly. Does one arm drift downward?

Speech: Ask the person to repeat a simple sentence. Are their words slurred or mixed up?

Time: If the person shows any of these symptoms, call 911 immediately. Brain cells are dying.

For more information, contact the Pitt County Memorial Hospital Stroke Center at 252-847-4369, or visit:

www.stroke.org

or

www.strokeassociation.org

A Dollar Goes A Long Way ...



Neighbor To Neighbor

For most of us, tales of cold winter nights conjure warm memories of grabbing a sweater, turning up the thermostat and curling up in front of a cozy fire. However, bone-chilling temperatures can create a harsh reality for many whose budgets don't stretch far enough to pay for heating bills.

Our Neighbor to Neighbor program provides funds to our residential customers who need temporary help paying their heating bills. Neighbor to Neighbor is supported by voluntary donations from GUC customers. Greenville Utilities contributes up to \$10,000 in matching funds each year. The Department of Social Services distributes the funds to those families who need it the most. Since 2001, the program has provided over \$100,000

to help keep the heat on in our community.

You can help and a little bit goes a long way. Did you know that one dollar can power an electric space heater for 6.5 hours ... a clothes dryer for nearly 2 hours ... a washing machine for 3 loads ... a crock pot for 66 hours? Consider making a one-time donation, or adding a recurring donation through your GUC bill. You can help keep a neighbor warm this winter.

For more information about the program, please call 752-7166.

If your civic club would like a speaker, we would be glad to give a presentation about the Neighbor to Neighbor Program.

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