



Press Release

For Release: Immediate

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Utility Winter Shut Off Moratorium Expiring Soon

Customers Urged to Work Out Payment Plans and Arrangements

Pittsfield, MA – April 17, 2009, As the winter heating season comes to a close, Berkshire Gas customers with overdue accounts and who are experiencing documented financial hardship, are urged to contact the Company, as soon as possible, to work out payment plans and arrangements in advance of the expiration of the shut-off moratorium on May 1, 2009.

The winter season service termination protection period protects customers with documented financial hardship throughout the winter months. This protection typically prohibits electric and natural gas utilities from shutting off service from November 15th through March 15th to residential gas heating consumers with a documented financial hardship. This year, the moratorium was extended to May 1st. Following the expiration of the moratorium, a utility may interrupt or terminate a customer's service if no efforts or arrangements are made to satisfy outstanding or overdue balances.

Documented financial hardship is certified when residential customers meet the income eligibility guideline for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

Berkshire Gas is committed to working proactively with customers in making affordable payment arrangements. In addition to winter shut-off protection, the Company offers a full range of payment programs and services to customers who are finding it difficult to pay their utility bills. Payment assistance is also offered by a number of outside human service agencies.

Customers with an outstanding balance who do not have a current payment arrangement with the Company should call Berkshire Gas as soon as possible to avoid service termination after the May 1 deadline.

Berkshire Gas Payment Assistance Programs and Services

- **Budget Payment Plans** - Budget payment plans allow customers more affordable payments by averaging higher winter bills with lower summer bills. This helps to spread the cost of winter heating over the entire year. To learn more and find out if you are eligible, please call our Customer Care Center at (800) 292-5012 or download the flyer from our website at <http://www.berkshiregas.com>
- **Installment Payment Plans for Overdue Balances** - Customers may enter into an installment payment plan to pay overdue charges. Berkshire Gas will allow a minimum of four months for the customer to pay overdue balances. A down payment may be required.

- Low-Income Discount Rate - Discounted non-heating and heating delivery charges are available to low-income residential customers that: Qualify for any means-tested public benefit program; OR Are eligible for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) or its successor program; AND the household's gross income does not exceed 60% of the State Median Income (SMI) level.

- Berkshire Gas RAMP Program - The Berkshire Gas Company's "Residential Arrearage Management Program" (RAMP) provides financial assistance to eligible low-income customers with active accounts that have outstanding bills in arrears. Under the RAMP program, eligible low-income customers may qualify for forgiveness of past due bills for natural gas service. Program participants receive credits to their past due account once all program requirements have been met. (Some restrictions may apply.)

Please call (800) 292-5012 or visit our website at <http://www.berkshiregas.com>.for more information about these programs and services.

Other Financial Assistance Resources

- Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) - A federally funded program to assist eligible low-income households pay a portion of their home winter heating bills. LIHEAP is available to both homeowners and renters. The eligibility and payment amount is determined by family size and gross annual household income.

- Heating Emergency Assistance Retrofit Task Weatherization Assistance Program (HEARTWAP)
This grant program provides low-income, fuel assistance-eligible homeowners with assistance for:

- * Heating system repair/replacement services
- * Heating system cleanings
- * Free energy, health and safety audit
- * Free attic and/or side-wall insulation, air sealing, weather-stripping and other winterization energy repairs

LIHEAP and HEARTWAP available through:

Berkshire Community Action Council

Pittsfield (413) 445-5671

North Adams (413) 663-3014

Great Barrington (413) 528-1947

Community Action of the Franklin, Hampshire and North Quabbin Regions

Franklin County (413) 774-2318

Hampshire County (800) 370-0940

- Good Neighbor Energy Fund - The Good Neighbor Energy Fund provides electric, gas, or oil heating assistance to Massachusetts residents with gross household income between 60% and 80% of the State Median Income Guidelines. This program is funded by Massachusetts utilities and utility customers. The grant per eligible household is \$300 per season regardless of amount owed.

The Good Neighbor Energy Fund is administered by the Salvation Army.

Amherst (413) 586-5243

Great Barrington (800) 262-1320
Pittsfield (413) 442-0624
North Adams (413) 663-7987
Greenfield (413) 773-3154

Assistance may also be available from area churches and civic organizations.