



Press Release

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Berkshire Gas Extends Winter Shut-Off Moratorium

Customers Get Extra Time to Work Out Payment Plans and Arrangements

Pittsfield, MA, March 15, 2010 – In an effort to help residential gas heating customers who are experiencing financial hardship coming out of the winter heating season, Berkshire Gas has agreed to extend the winter shut-off protection period, commonly referred to as the winter season service termination protection period, from March 15 to April 16, 2010.

During the winter season service termination protection period (November 15 through March 15), electric and natural gas utilities are prohibited from shutting off service to residential gas heating consumers with a documented financial hardship. 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.

Berkshire Gas has voluntarily extended the shut off protection to give customers extra time to catch up on their bills and make any necessary arrangements for the last several years. The company 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 Berkshire Gas should call the company as soon as possible to avoid service termination after the April 16 deadline.

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Berkshire Gas Payment Assistance Programs and Services

- Budget Payment Plans: Budget payment plans provide customers with 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 they are eligible, customers should call the Berkshire Gas Customer Care Center at (800) 292-5012 or download the flyer at 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 eligible low-income residential customers. To be eligible, customers must qualify for any means-tested public benefit program OR be eligible for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) or its successor program AND household gross income cannot exceed 60% of the State Median Income (SMI).
- Berkshire Gas RAMP Program: The Residential Arrearage Management Program (RAMP) provides financial assistance to eligible low-income customers with active accounts who have outstanding bills in arrears. Under RAMP, 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 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: This fund provides electric, gas or oil heating assistance to Massachusetts residents with gross household income between 60% and 80% of the State Median Income. 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.