

GOVERNOR JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM

Friday, October 28, 2005

Hello this is Governor Jennifer Granholm.

As we begin to turn the corner from fall to winter and thermostats click on across the state, consumers in Michigan, like states across the country, will be impacted significantly by higher energy bills this year.

The increases stem from hurricanes in the gulf, short supply around the nation and increasing demand around the world – but they can have a devastating impact right here at home.

This week, I signed sign emergency rules to protect consumers who can least afford these sharp spikes in heating and energy costs.

The emergency rules were sent to my desk by the Michigan Public Service Commission, a three-member body that oversees our state utilities, and they make some key changes to billing practices during the months of November through March.

First, they lengthen the time between the date utility service bills are sent to customers and the due date, making sure that folks have more time than usual to put a check in the mail.

Second, the rules prevent utilities from shutting off service or charging late payment fees for failure to pay an estimated bill by the due date.

We are also prohibiting utilities from blocking service to seniors or those on fixed or limited incomes, to make sure that winter weather and skyrocketing costs don't put our vulnerable citizens at further risk.

And finally, utilities will not be allowed to require a deposit from a customer, unless that customer has been shutoff for nonpayment during the prior 12 months.

And in addition to these rules, we're taking other steps to assist working families. Earlier this month, my office put the state's natural gas suppliers on notice that the Public Service Commission will be watching their operations closely to ensure that customers are receiving delivery that is efficient and rates that are as low as possible to power their homes and businesses this winter.

I also recently led a bi-partisan group of 28 governors who asked Congress to fund a significant increase in Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program funding.

We all know that Michigan winters are harsh enough without having your gas or electric service shut off, due to bills that can't be paid. And in Michigan, just as we put on those extra layers on for warmth in the winter, my administration will continue to fight for extra layers of security for our seniors, our working families and our most vulnerable citizens during a season that will see much higher energy costs.

Thank you for listening.