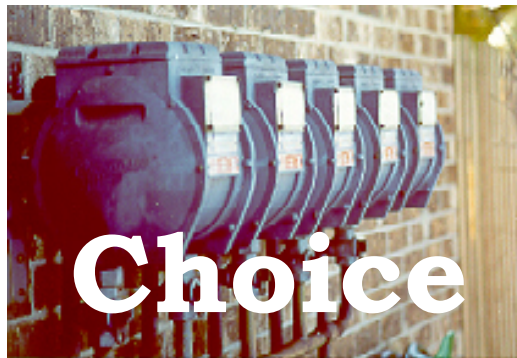




# Consumer Alert

## Natural Gas Choice Is Here

### What Customers Should Know About Switching to an Alternative Gas Supplier



If you are a natural gas customer, you may have the choice of purchasing your natural gas from an Alternative Gas Supplier (AGS) at **unregulated prices**. Traditionally, your only option for natural gas service was to have a natural gas utility purchase and deliver natural gas to your home under rates regulated by the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC). The Natural Gas Customer Choice program allows you the option of continuing as a full-service customer with your utility or shopping for natural gas, purchasing it from an AGS, and having it delivered by your current natural gas utility. Currently, AGSs are operating in areas served by Consumers Energy, DTE Energy (also known as Michigan Consolidated Gas Company), Aquila Networks (also known as Michigan Gas Utilities), and SEMCO Energy. One key to successful participation in the natural gas Customer Choice program is to become knowledgeable about the rates, terms, and conditions of your purchase.

#### Some Things You Should Know About Michigan's Natural Gas Choice Market:

- You do not have to switch to an AGS.
- If you stay as a full-service customer of your current utility, your natural gas rates will continue to be regulated by the MPSC.
- If you choose to purchase your natural gas from an AGS, the gas rate you are charged for natural gas will **NOT** be regulated by the MPSC. You will be responsible for choosing the AGS and complying with the contract made between you and the AGS.
- Whether you stay with your utility as a full-service natural gas customer or contract with an AGS for your natural gas supply, your current natural gas utility will continue to deliver the gas, read your meter, bill you, and handle gas line emergencies as they do now. Your natural gas utility will also continue to charge you for these services as they do now at rates regulated by the MPSC. When you receive your bill, you will pay your current natural gas utility and the utility, in turn, will pay your AGS.

#### Become an Informed Shopper:

- What rate will you be charged? Will the rate remain constant for the term of the contract (a "fixed rate") or can the rate change from month to month (a "variable rate")? If it varies, how much and how will you be informed of rate changes? How long will you be guaranteed this price?
- Is there a cancellation penalty after the 30-day cancellation period? If so, how much? The cancellation penalty could be a set amount or a charge for every month left in the contract.
- How do you cancel your contract after the 30-day cancellation period? Do you cancel over the telephone or in writing? How long will it take to cancel the contract?
- What happens at the end of the contract? Is it automatically renewed unless you take steps to cancel it? If it is automatically renewed, how will you be contacted about price changes?
- What is the process for handling a billing dispute with the AGS?
- How will you contact the AGS if you have billing questions? Is there staff available during regular business hours to take your call?



## Standard Precautions Customers Should Take:

- If someone comes to your door marketing AGS services, get identification information.
- In order to switch your account, an AGS needs your utility account number. Do not give the representative your utility account number (it is on your bill) unless you want to switch suppliers. You do not have to give this information in order to learn about the AGS or to receive information on the program. You will need to provide your utility account number if you contract with an AGS.
- Before making the decision to change suppliers, shop and compare prices, terms, and conditions of the various AGSs and those of your local utility. You do not need to contract with the first AGS that markets to you. You have the right to stay a full-service customer of your local utility and get your natural gas at regulated prices. You can check current rates on the MPSC website at: <http://www.michigan.gov/mpsc> and clicking on “Natural Gas”, then “Compare Offers”.
- Read the contract and make sure you understand it before signing it. Get all agreements in writing.
- If you sign up over the telephone, a copy of the contract must be sent to you within 7 days. Read the contract immediately, and if you have concerns, contact the AGS. Once you have received the contract, you may still cancel as long as you do so within 30 days of the day you agree to the service.

## Some Additional Information About Customer Choice

- All residential customers must be mailed a confirmation letter from the alternative gas supplier within 7 days of signing up.
- All residential customers are entitled to a 30-day cancellation period counting from the day they initially sign up.
- If you switch to an AGS, the change will occur at the beginning of the utility’s next billing cycle, which generally means it generally takes 2 to 6 weeks for the actual change to show up on your bill.
- If you decide to cancel the contract and return to full-service from your natural gas utility, contact your AGS. You may want to send your cancellation request certified mail so you have a record of your request. It will take 2 to 6 weeks for the change to show up on your bill.

## For More Information:

- For more information about Natural Gas Customer Choice, go to the MPSC’s website at <http://www.michigan.gov/mpsc> and click on “Natural Gas” in the column at the left. You can also obtain information by visiting your utility’s website, or calling them:
  - Aquila – 800-648-0795 or on-line at <https://networks.aquila.com/michoice/>
  - Consumers Energy – 800-418-2263 or on-line at <http://www.consumersenergy.com/welcome.htm>
  - DTE Energy – 800-477-4747 or on-line at <http://utilities.dteenergy.com/infoZone/customerChoice/>
  - SEMCO - 800-624-2019 or on-line at <http://www.semcoenergygas.com/resident/choice.html>
- Many AGSs also have websites, which can be reached from the MPSC webpage.

