



NEWS RELEASE

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Key energy assistance deadlines nearing as home heating season approaches; learn ways to help keep winter utility bills manageable

With temperatures getting cooler and residents still being impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Michigan Public Service Commission is reminding Michiganders to plan ahead to help manage utility bills as home heating season nears.

Two important deadlines for energy assistance are fast approaching:

- Apply by Sept. 30 for the [Home Heating Credit](#) using Michigan tax form MI-1040CR-7.
- Utility customers who already have received State Emergency Relief (SER) or Michigan Energy Assistance Program (MEAP) may also be eligible for additional assistance because of increased cap amounts. The deadline to apply for the additional assistance is Sept. 30; after that, assistance levels return to their lower amounts. You can apply or find out more about SER and MEAP through MI Bridges at michigan.gov/mibridges. If you need help applying, call 211 and ask for a MEAP grantee near you for help. Current grantee information also is available [here](#).

“We want to make sure that Michiganders who need help keeping warm this winter know what resources are available,” said MPSC Chair Dan Scripps. “It’s important not to miss the deadlines, because the Home Heating Credit and increased funding for energy assistance can provide significant help for families struggling to afford their energy bills. Don’t wait to seek the help you need.”

There are several energy assistance programs and shutoff protections available that, while not relieving utility customers of their responsibility to pay for their energy use, will help customers obtain or maintain utility service, especially during winter:

- The [Winter Protection Plan](#) protects both seniors and low-income customers of MPSC-regulated natural gas and electric companies. Customers may find relief from electric or natural gas service shutoff and high utility payments between Nov. 1 and March 31.
- Seniors 65 or older worried about their energy service should contact their utility. The MPSC and state law require all regulated gas and electric companies, and municipal electric utilities, to [provide shutoff protection](#) for seniors 65 and older during the heating season, Nov. 1 through March 31.
- Through [medical emergency shutoff protection](#), eligible customers may receive a medical hold preventing service from being disconnected for nonpayment on natural gas and/or electric bills for up to 21 days if a customer or a member of the customer's household has an existing medical condition that would be aggravated by the lack of utility service.
- Through [critical care shutoff protection](#), a customer or household can receive protection from disconnection or have services restored due to inability to pay if there is an identified critical care customer in the home and interruption of service would be immediately life threatening.
- Active duty customers or the spouses of those called to full-time active military duty during a time of declared national or state emergency or war may [apply for shutoff protection](#) for electric or natural gas service for up to 90 days, with the option to reapply for extensions. Additionally, families of veterans and active duty military personnel can receive emergency financial assistance to pay electric, oil, gas, and other heating fuels. Contact the [Michigan Department of Military and Veterans Affairs](#).
- Contact the Michigan Department of Treasury or the federal Internal Revenue Service about the [Earned Income Tax Credit](#), which could offset some living expenses for qualified households by helping pay utility bills.

“Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the MPSC has worked with other state agencies to prioritize and streamline the availability of energy assistance,” said Orlene Hawks, Director of the Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs. “I am proud of the Commission’s hard work to help protect our state’s most vulnerable populations, especially now as colder weather is starting to set in.”

Space heating in homes takes up more than half a household’s energy use annually in Michigan, according to the federal Energy Information Administration. Here are ways you can prepare for winter bills:

- Contact a certified professional and schedule a furnace tune-up so it runs more efficiently. Replace filters regularly; clogged filters make a furnace work harder. If replacing the furnace, look for the [ENERGY STAR logo](#), which indicates a high-efficiency product.
- Discuss with your utility provider programs that can help to manage costs. Ask about or sign up for [demand response or time-of-use programs](#), a budget plan, low-income assistance, active duty military shutoff protection or a winter protection plan.

- Research options before [signing up with a propane provider](#). Locking in a contract now can mean lower prices. More than 8 percent of Michigan households use propane as their primary heating fuel, and the state leads the nation in total residential consumption.
- Now's a great time to tackle home improvements that [reduce energy waste](#). Seal cracks around windows and doors to keep heat from escaping. Check air ducts and seal openings against leaks. Insulate attics and crawl spaces. Install a programmable thermostat, which can save an estimated 10 percent a year on heating and cooling. Familiarize yourself with how to safely operate [supplemental heating sources](#) for your home, and [portable generators](#) should you lose power.
- If you're considering purchasing your natural gas through an alternative gas supplier, be sure to shop around. Browse the MPSC's [CompareMIGas website](#) to compare the rates of suppliers serving in your utility service area, but be sure you understand the terms and conditions before signing a contract.

For information about the MPSC, visit www.michigan.gov/mpsc, sign up for one of its [listservs](#), or follow the Commission on [Twitter](#). To watch a livestream of the MPSC's meetings, [click here](#).