

# THE NEW HAMPSHIRE RATE WATCHER

The Consumer Newsletter of the  
New Hampshire Office of Consumer Advocate  
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*Q. Want to reduce your electric bills and help protect the environment?*

*A. Read on!*

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As advances in technology continue to improve our lives, our demand for electricity continues to grow. Increased consumption of electricity, however, can increase the cost of electricity and negatively impact the environment.

Market prices for electricity in New England are driven by natural gas, which is used to fuel generating plants built over the last several years. As we witnessed in the wake of the Gulf Coast hurricanes, supplies of natural gas are finite and can be very expensive. In addition to natural gas, we also use oil, coal, and other fossil fuels to make electricity. These sources release harmful emissions of toxic substances – and greenhouse gas emissions – into the atmosphere. Coal, which is used at two plants in New Hampshire, is usually less expensive than natural gas but is one of the dirtiest fuels.

New Hampshire also benefits from having renewable energy sources in our generation mix, including hydroelectric and biomass (wood) plants. Efforts are underway in the Legislature to increase the amount of renewable energy that we use in the state, in order to reach the Governor's target of 25% renewable energy by the year 2025.

While lawmakers on the state and federal levels grapple with ways to encourage generators to diversify their fuel sources and reduce emissions, there are things that we can all do in our daily lives to use less electricity and reduce pollution in our state and in our region. This is even more important during the summer heat waves, as our peak demand for electricity continues to grow each summer. On the hottest days we use about as much as we can produce, requiring that our dirtiest plants and back-up diesel generators come online to fuel our hunger for power. Think about your impact on those hot summer days, and read on for ideas on how you can reduce your own power needs.

## **REDUCE**

Reducing our use can be as simple as turning off the lights when you do not need them. There are many other simple things we can do to reduce our use. For outdoor lights used for safety reasons, install motion-sensor lights that only go on when needed. In your office, turn off the lights when you go to a meeting or leave for lunch. Use compact fluorescent lights whenever possible. They use much less energy, give off less heat, and last longer than incandescent bulbs. They are available for most lighting uses, including outdoor flood lights, bathroom vanity fixtures, and kitchen lighting. Check out the selection of compact fluorescent bulbs and fixtures at your local retailer – many of them qualify for a rebate right at the register through the statewide “Core” ratepayer-funded efficiency programs. You can also visit the “Core” website online at [www.nhsaves.org](http://www.nhsaves.org) to request a free catalog or shop online. If every home in the country replaced one incandescent bulb with a compact fluorescent, we would save enough electricity to light 2.5 million households, nearly twice the population of New Hampshire! If each household replaced 10 bulbs,

the energy conserved would be equivalent to taking 10 million cars off the road. We each need to do our part.

### ENERGY STAR Products

Another way to reduce your costs and reduce your impact on the environment is to use energy efficient appliances. ENERGY STAR is a joint program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy whose purpose is to help consumers save money and protect the environment through energy efficient products and practices. In 2006 alone, ENERGY STAR helped Americans reduce their energy consumption by enough to avoid greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to those from 25 million cars and save \$14 billion on their utility bills.

Energy efficient choices can save families about a third on their energy bill with similar savings of greenhouse gas emissions and without sacrificing features, style or comfort. When you look for new household products, such as lighting fixtures and bulbs as well as appliances, make an energy efficient choice. Look for those that have earned the ENERGY STAR label,<sup>1</sup> which meet strict energy efficiency guidelines set by the EPA and US Department of Energy.

Today, ENERGY STAR choices are available for all kinds of household appliances including dishwashers, refrigerators, clothes washers and dryers, air conditioners, and dehumidifiers. ENERGY STAR also features a line of residential lighting fixtures and compact fluorescent light bulbs. ENERGY STAR even offers energy-efficient home electronic equipment such as cordless telephones, televisions and VCRs. To learn more about the ENERGY STAR program and the numerous products that are available, visit [www.energystar.gov](http://www.energystar.gov). Also, at [www.nhsaves.com](http://www.nhsaves.com) you can view retailers in New Hampshire that offer energy efficient products.

Stated simply, you have nothing to lose and everything to gain by reducing your energy consumption and switching to energy efficient products. What are you waiting for?

## **REPLACE**

### Energy-Efficient Air Conditioners

Due to increasingly warm summers in New Hampshire, more of us are using air conditioning in our homes. This increase in air conditioning use plays a large role in the new record levels of electricity demand that we have been setting over the past few summers. About one-seventh of all the electricity generated in the U.S. is used to cool buildings.<sup>2</sup> With New Hampshire now a summer peaking state, we need to do all we can to reduce our demand on the hottest summer days to avoid problems with our regional electric grid.

With summer approaching, now is a good time to replace that old air conditioner with a new ENERGY STAR air conditioner.

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<sup>1</sup> “Earning the ENERGY STAR” means a product meets strict energy efficiency guidelines set by the US Environmental Protection Agency and the US Department of Energy.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Annual Energy Outlook 2007 Report #:DOE/EIA-0383(2007)

### *Room Air Conditioners*

Replacing a 10-year-old room air conditioner with a new ENERGY STAR qualified model saves an average of \$25 a year on your electric bill. ENERGY STAR qualified room air conditioners use at least 10% less energy than conventional models. Also, ENERGY STAR qualified room air conditioners often include timers for better temperature control, which allow you to use the minimum amount of energy you need to cool your room.

Many people buy a room air conditioner that is too large. However, an oversized air conditioner is actually less effective and wastes energy to run. Air conditioners remove both heat and humidity from the air. If the unit is too large, it will cool the room quickly, but only remove some of the humidity. This leaves the room with a damp, clammy feeling. A properly sized unit will remove humidity effectively as it cools. When buying a room air conditioner, make sure your unit is [properly sized](#). For information on properly sized room air conditioners, see [www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=roomac.pr\\_properly\\_sized](http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=roomac.pr_properly_sized).

For purchases made between March 1 and July 31, 2007, all of the NH's electric utilities offer a \$20 rebate for the purchase of an ENERGY STAR qualified room air conditioner. Contact your local electric utility or visit their website to download the rebate form. You may also visit the NH Saves website, [www.nhsaves.com](http://www.nhsaves.com), to download the rebate form and view other energy efficiency information.

### *Central Air Conditioners*

ENERGY STAR qualified central air conditioners have a higher seasonal efficiency rating (SEER) than standard models, which makes them about 8% more efficient. Though these products can be more expensive to purchase up front, the cost difference will be paid back over time through lower energy bills. Keep in mind, when buying a new central air conditioner, it is important to have it installed by a qualified contractor and to seal your home for better performance.

The Federal Energy Policy Act of 2005 provides for a \$300 tax credit for the purchase of *certain* central air conditioning units. For more information on the rebate, please call toll free 1-877-Energy (1-877-366-3749) or visit [www.energystar.gov](http://www.energystar.gov).

There are a few simple things you can do to save electricity while using an air conditioner: turn up the temperature to the highest setting that you can, and use window shades to keep the heat from the sun out of the room to reduce the work that the air conditioner has to do to cool the room.

## **RESOURCES**

### Statewide Energy Efficiency Program Information Center

We all contribute on our electric bills to the utility-administered statewide "Core" energy efficiency programs. You can learn more about the programs by calling your utility or checking your utility's website, or get information at [www.nhsaves.com](http://www.nhsaves.com). There is also an automated telephone line that offers brief descriptions of all of the energy efficiency programs available in New Hampshire. To reach the Statewide Energy Efficiency Program Call Center, dial toll-free, 1-866-226-2420.

Helpful websites: Check out these websites for more information: [www.aceee.org](http://www.aceee.org), [www.buyenergyefficient.org](http://www.buyenergyefficient.org), [www.energyhog.org](http://www.energyhog.org).

## Telecom Industry News

### Verizon New England, Inc.'s proposed sale of its franchise to FairPoint Communications, Inc.

In January Verizon New England, Inc. (Verizon NE) and FairPoint Communications Inc. (FairPoint) filed joint petitions with the New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission, Vermont Public Service Board and the Maine Public Utilities Commission seeking approval of a series of transactions that, if approved, would result in FairPoint (through subsidiaries) acquiring the current Verizon NE franchise to provide wireline telecommunications services in New Hampshire, Maine and Vermont as well as the network Verizon NE currently uses to provide those services. In New Hampshire, the Commission must find that the transaction is in the public good.

The Commission has opened a docket, DT 07-011, and approved a procedural schedule that sets hearings in late September. The Commission will also hold public statement hearings in several locations across the state to hear from the public on the proposed transaction. The dates for these public statement hearings have not yet been announced.

In determining whether the proposed transaction is in the public good, the Commission must balance the interests of the utilities and the customers. The OCA will advocate on behalf of all residential customers of Verizon as a party in the proceeding.

Since the joint petition was filed in New Hampshire, the OCA has received many calls and emails voicing concern about the proposed transaction. We value this feedback, and we believe that it is also important that questions or concerns about Verizon's sale to FairPoint are directed to the Commission, which is charged with determining whether the sale should take place. You may do so in the following ways.

1. You may submit written comments to the Commission, to the attention of Debra Howland, Executive Director & Secretary, NH Public Utilities Commission, 21 S. Fruit Street, Suite 10, Concord, New Hampshire 03301-7319. Be sure to include the docket number, DT 07-011, and to send a copy of your comments to the OCA.
2. You may make comments at a hearing. Please be advised, however, that public comments are different from testimony and do not entitle the introduction of evidence into the record, presentation of witnesses, cross-examination of witnesses, or filing of legal pleadings. If you wish to participate in such a formal manner, you must request permission to intervene as a party in accordance with NHPUC rules. Puc 203 (available on the NHPUC website at [www.puc.nh.gov/Regulatory/rules](http://www.puc.nh.gov/Regulatory/rules)) governs the procedure of adjudicatory dockets.
3. Any member of the public may go in person to the Commission's offices in Concord to review non-confidential documents on file in its library. Certain filings, such as Verizon and FairPoint's joint petition and the Commission's procedural order, are available on the Commission's website at

[www.puc.nh.gov/Telecom/VerizonSaleToFairpoint](http://www.puc.nh.gov/Telecom/VerizonSaleToFairpoint). For further information about the docket, including the public statement hearings, call the Commission's Consumer Affairs Division at 1-800-852-3793.

For more information about how to participate in this and any other docket of the Commission, please visit our website at [www.oca.nh.gov/takeaction](http://www.oca.nh.gov/takeaction).

## LEGISLATIVE CORNER

### Here are a few bills that the OCA is following:

→*SB 123 Relative to pole attachments* Authorizes the public utilities commission to regulate pole attachments.

→*SB 177 Relative to orders of reparation by the PUC* Allows the PUC to order refunds to customers when a utility fails to meet service quality standards.

→*SB 140 Relative to siting and construction of renewable generation assets*

→*SB259 Establishing state appliance and equipment energy efficiency standards*

*HB 119 Relative to the sunset provision of the low income portion of the system benefits charge.*

Removes the sun-setting language on the electric assistance program, allowing it to exist in perpetuity.

→*HB 361 Relative to technical changes in certain laws governing public utilities, and allowing the OCA to make a special assessment in the FairPoint/Verizon case*

→*HB 873 Establishing minimum renewable energy standards for energy portfolios*

Unfortunately, there are not many consumer groups making their voices heard on these issues in our legislature. It is therefore important that consumers contact their legislators to voice your opinion. Find your legislator by visiting <http://gencourt.state.nh.us/ie/whosmyleg/>. View the status of these bills or others by visiting <http://gencourt.state.nh.us/ie/billstatus/quickbill.html>.

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*If you have ideas or suggestions for an upcoming newsletter, or have comments regarding this or prior newsletters, please contact Christina Martin at 271-1172.*

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