

# Facts and Tips on Winter Heating

# Energy Solutions this winter

Rising energy costs are a concern for many New Brunswickers. Recognizing the challenges we will face this coming winter heating season, your government has in place a variety of programs to help people reduce their heating costs and work with their utilities to help find solutions to assist them in meeting their electricity bill payments.

In order for a utility to provide assistance, it is essential that you contact them so that they understand your personal financial situation and can work with you to find a solution.

The following frequently asked questions will serve as a guide to the options available as we approach this winter heating season.



## Can I get help paying my electricity bills?

Although it is an individual's responsibility to pay their electricity bill, there are a number of programs available from both government and non-government agencies that may assist you in reducing your bills or provide income assistance if you are in financial need.

Efficiency New Brunswick, government's energy efficiency agency, provides incentives to improve the energy efficiency of your home and reduce your heating costs. All New Brunswickers are eligible for a program in which up to 20% of the cost of upgrading your home will be covered by government. For more information, contact *Efficiency NB* at 1-866-643-8833 or [www.energynb.ca](http://www.energynb.ca).

If you are having difficulty paying your bills due to a legitimate economic need, the Department of Social Development provides income assistance programs for low-income individuals. There are also programs that provide cash payments to off-set heating costs for eligible households in financial need. Finally, the Department of Social Development offers a program to help reduce the heating costs of low income households. You could receive up to \$4500 to improve the efficiency of heating systems, air sealing, insulation, windows, doors and ventilation systems. For more information, contact your nearest Department of Social Development regional office:

- Acadian Peninsula: 1-866-441-4149;
- Chaleur: 1-866-441-4341;
- Edmundston: 1-866-441-4249;
- Fredericton: 1-866-444-8838;
- Miramichi: 1-866-441-4246;
- Moncton: 1-866-426-5191;
- Restigouche: 1-866-441-4245;
- Saint John: 1-866-441-4340.

Local governments and not-for-profit groups may also provide assistance with budgeting tips, advice on how to use less electricity or in some cases may have emergency funds available to help those at risk. The government has partnered with the Salvation Army to provide assistance to New Brunswickers, you can find out more information through your local Service New Brunswick service centre.

## What if I can afford to pay more in the summer, but can't afford my whole bill in winter?

Your utility can also help you work within your personal financial situation to find ways to pay your electricity bill. You might be able to spread or level out your payments throughout the year. An equalized payment plan may offer you the predictability that will help you budget, particularly during colder months.



## **During the winter months, my electricity bills increase and I can't afford to pay them. What can I do?**

The first step an individual should take is to contact their utility. Utilities are sensitive to these difficult times, and their representatives will work with you. It is very important that you discuss the status of your account so that they can provide options and advice. You can reduce your bills by learning some easy ways to decrease the amount of electricity you use. Many ideas do not cost any money but will help you use less energy. For example, by reducing the temperature at night you can save money and you will sleep better. Others cost very little to implement and help reduce your bill. For example, plastic sheet window kits help keep drafts out and heat in. In addition to offering suggestions, utilities will work with you on your payment plan.

The government maintains a policy on winter disconnections, first announced by government in 2006. Under recent changes, your power will not be disconnected between November and the end of April, provided that you are in legitimate economic need, you have contacted your utility to discuss your account, and that you continue to make mutually-agreed-upon payments on your outstanding balance. This winter disconnection policy does not mean you do not have to pay your electricity bills. Payment remains your responsibility.

Government works regularly with utilities to ensure that they and their customers can work together to find solutions to minimize the risk of increased financial burden during winter.

Most importantly though, if you are having difficulty paying your bill, it is essential that your utility knows and understands your personal situation. Their agents are trained to work with you, make recommendations, and provide advice on your account and ways that you can reduce your bill. If they don't know that you have a problem they can't help you.

## **Can I be disconnected in the winter?**

Disconnection at any time is a last resort for your utility. Under government's winter disconnection policy, your power will not be disconnected in winter, provided that you are in legitimate economic need, you have contacted your utility to discuss your account, and that you continue to make mutually-agreed-upon payments on your outstanding balance. This winter disconnection policy does not mean you do not have to pay your electricity bills. Payment remains your responsibility. It is critical that customers communicate with their utility about their account.

It is essential for you to notify your utility if you experience difficulty keeping your payment arrangement. Both your utility and government agencies can provide tips on how to reduce your electricity consumption. There are also government and non-government agencies that may be able to help. However, no one will be able to assist you if they do not know you are in need. It is important for you to contact groups if you need help.

## **What if there's a month when I can't afford to pay my whole bill or if I have an overdue account?**

Call your utility immediately and let it know. The utility will work with you to offer solutions to help you manage your electricity consumption and your power bill. Its agents will work with you to develop a payment plan that will enable you to pay overdue amounts over time, as well as keep up with ongoing bills.

## What should I do if my utility sends me a disconnect notice?

Call your utility right away! It is essential for you to contact your utility immediately to resolve the situation or you will be disconnected. Disconnection at any time is always a last resort and your utility is unlikely to disconnect you if you remain in contact with them and make some kind of arrangement to make payments. Staying in contact with your utility is very important. Your utility needs to understand your personal financial situation. This is very important, because disconnect notices are based on customer payment history. An account is subject to disconnection for non-payment when the terms and conditions outlined on the back of your monthly bill are not met.

Staying in touch with your utility is critical.

## Heat/electricity is included in my rent, so what should I do to be sure that I won't lose service?

Be sure to ask your landlord questions about what is included in your rent and what to do if service is affected. This is particularly important if you can't reach your landlord during regular hours or afterward. Protect yourself. Have backup contact information, and make certain that the process works. If you are unable to reach your landlord and anticipate problems, you should contact the Rentalsman. The Rentalsman is a government official responsible for protecting the rights of tenants and landlords. You can find contact information for the Rentalsman in your area can be found by calling 1-888-762-8600.

Due to privacy laws, your utility cannot discuss the account of your landlord.

**And remember, the first point of contact if you are having difficulty paying your electricity bill should always be your utility. They are here to help, and work with you in finding a solution to your challenges this winter heating season.**

NB Power 1-800-663-6272 or [www.nbpower.com](http://www.nbpower.com)

Saint John Energy (506) 658-5252

Edmundston Energy (506) 739-2118

Perth-Andover Electric Light Commission (506) 273-4959

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# Top 10 energy saving tips

1. Use ENERGY STAR-rated compact fluorescent lights (CFLs) and always look for the ENERGY STAR symbol. Products displaying the ENERGY STAR symbol can help reduce energy and operating costs by 30 per cent to 50 per cent. ENERGY STAR-rated compact fluorescent lights (CFLs) use up to 75 per cent less energy and last up to 10 times longer than traditional light bulbs
2. Fix faucet leaks. A leak of only one drop per second wastes about 10,000 litres of water per year.
3. Use low-flow showerheads. They use up to 60 per cent less water than standard ones without changing the water pressure.
4. Wash and rinse clothes in cold water and Air-dry your clothes whenever possible. Each load of laundry using cold water can reduce the energy used by 90 per cent. Line drying will save money and make clothes last longer.
5. Unplug home electronics. Computers, televisions and other home electronics continue to draw electricity even when turned off. This is known as standby power losses. Unplug old, empty fridges or freezers.
6. Install and set a programmable thermostat. This can save two per cent on the heating bill for every 1 degree C turned down the thermostat at night. Turn thermostats back at night and when away for long periods throughout the day.
7. Change or clean the furnace filter. A dusty filter means the furnace is working harder than otherwise to circulate heated air.
8. Turn electric baseboard heaters off at the electrical panel until the start of the heating season. Keep baseboard heaters and radiators clean and make sure they're not blocked by furniture, carpeting, or drapes.
9. Use window kits to increase the performance and comfort of windows. Use weather-stripping, caulking, and expanding foam to seal areas of air leakage.
10. Operating times of certain devices should be closely monitored. Be aware that devices such as air conditioners, dehumidifiers, pumps, car heaters, heating cable, heat recovery ventilators and others can have a major impact on a power bill. Consider timers as an option for some of these.

