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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NOVEMBER 1 STARTS NEBRASKA'S NATURAL GAS
COLD WEATHER RULE

LINCOLN – Financially strapped customers of Nebraska's jurisdictional natural gas utilities will have an additional 30 days to pay their bills for a five-month period starting November 1.

The Nebraska Public Service Commission's cold weather rule applies only to customers of the state's jurisdictional utilities – Black Hills Energy, which now includes both Black Hills and legacy SourceGas Distribution service territories, and Northwestern Energy. From November 1 through March 31, Black Hills and Northwestern may not shut off service to customers without allowing an additional 30 days to pay beyond the normal bill due date.

First District Commissioner Frank Landis of Lincoln said the cold weather rule is a tool for customers and the companies to work together in a period when natural gas bills are the highest. "The cold weather rule is intended to provide an opportunity for customers to work out a payment plan with their natural gas supplier."

Several leading weather forecasting services are predicting colder than normal temperatures this winter and a cool spring, meaning potentially higher heating bills that can put a financial burden on customers. "Any customer finding it difficult to pay natural gas bills during the winter months should contact the company to make arrangements for payment," advised Commission Chairman Tim Schram, representing the Third District. "Customers can also contact local public assistance agency for help with natural gas bills," said Schram.

There are several strategies for customers seeking to minimize the impact of higher natural gas bills during the winter. Such strategies include: setting the thermostat a little cooler, gas utilities recommend 68 degrees or lower, reducing thermostat settings when a home or building is unoccupied, checking gas appliances and space-heating equipment for efficient operation, obtaining a home energy audit to identify ways to conserve energy, and participation in a gas company's yearly budget plan to spread gas costs throughout the year.

Other ideas include improving the insulation in a home by installing storm windows and doors, attaching clear plastic to the inside or outside of windows and screen doors, caulking around windows and door frames, and covering window air conditioners.

The Public Service Commission implemented the cold weather rule when it was given regulatory authority over the state's jurisdictional utilities in 2003. Nebraska communities served by municipally owned natural gas utilities are not subject to regulation by the Commission and not required to comply with the cold weather rule.

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