

*Iowa Utilities Board***NEWS***Elizabeth S. Jacobs, Chair**Nick Wagner, Board Member**Sheila K. Tipton, Board Member***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** July 31, 2014**Contact** | Rob Hillesland, 515.725.7322, rob.hillesland@iub.iowa.gov **Web site** | <http://iub.iowa.gov>

Consumer options for managing high utility bills

Iowa Utilities Board recommends first contacting utility for assistance

(Des Moines) – The Iowa Utilities Board reminds customers facing high utility bills that local utility companies typically have programs to assist them in staying current on monthly billings, repaying accumulated utility debt while maintaining service, and assessing and implementing potential energy-saving options to reduce their future utility costs.

Customer utility bills often increase with seasonal temperature extremes, especially if consumers have not implemented energy efficient measures or other energy-saving steps in advance. Customers should inquire with their utility about its energy efficiency programs and/or bill payment options for helping customers during high-cost months. Many utilities also provide customers home energy assessments as a free service as well as a wide range of energy-saving information and advice.

Customers who are struggling to pay energy utility bills are encouraged to work with their local utility provider for options to avoid service disconnection, which during temperature extremes can be especially dangerous for persons who are elderly or have pre-existing medical conditions. The telephone number to contact the utility company can usually be found near the top of the first page of their billing statement.

If a customer is not in default on a previous payment agreement, their utility can offer a reasonable payment agreement with the option of spreading payments for past-due amounts over at least 12 months. A reasonable payment agreement takes into account income, expenses, and extraordinary financial circumstances that may affect ability to pay. If a customer is eligible for a payment arrangement, they should always discuss the terms and monthly payment amount with their utility provider. Once a payment agreement is in place the customer must abide by the terms of an accepted agreement. Missing a payment by even one day may void the agreement and make the customer subject to service disconnection with just one-day notice. For budgeting purposes, be aware that monthly payments as part of a payment agreement are expenses in addition to future utility bills.

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Another option for customers to consider is enrollment in a level-payment or budget-billing program through their utility. This enables customers to make equal monthly payments throughout the year, which may offer a long-range solution to help manage utility costs. The utility company may occasionally increase or decrease the monthly payment amount based on a customer's actual usage.

After a customer has contacted their utility, if they still have questions or if they and their utility cannot agree upon a payment arrangement, they should contact the Iowa Utilities Board for assistance toll free at 1-877-565-4450, customer@iub.iowa.gov, or at 1375 E. Court Avenue, Room 69, Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0069.

In some circumstances, local Community Action Agencies, churches, or other community organizations may be able to offer financial assistance to customers who are having difficulty paying their utility bills. For energy emergency assistance, customers may also call the 211 community services number to inquire about available help resources in their area.

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The Iowa Utilities Board regulates utilities to ensure that reasonably priced, reliable, environmentally responsible, and safe utility services are available to all Iowans.

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