

Cold weather rule extended in Nebraska

(KLZA)--In response to the arctic cold that gripped a large portion of the nation including Nebraska in late February, the Nebraska Public Service Commission (PSC), Tuesday, March 2, issued an Order extending the Cold Weather Rule and opening a docket to investigate the effects of the cold weather event.

“Gas utilities under PSC regulation have told us that the spike in natural gas prices during this event will likely cause a substantial impact on customers’ bills in the coming months,” said Commission Chair Dan Watermeier. “We’re exploring what options we have to help mitigate the impact of this spike.”

To aid in this information gathering process, the PSC will hold workshops in early April with each of its jurisdictional gas utilities, Black Hills Energy and NorthWestern Energy. Details on the two workshops can be found in the Order opening the docket (NG-111/PI-237) on the PSC website.

As a part of this effort the PSC has also extended its cold weather rule through May 31. Implemented in 2003, when the PSC was given regulatory authority over the state’s jurisdictional gas utilities (Black Hill Energy and NorthWestern Energy) the cold weather rule provides financially strapped customers a little extra time to pay their bills during the winter months and adds protection for low-income customers.

Commissioner Watermeier said, “Typically the cold weather rule runs from November through March. By extending it, we hope to help ensure natural gas service remains uninterrupted in the event customers experience higher bills.”

The cold weather rule, which applies only to Nebraska’s jurisdictional natural gas utilities assures a customer’s service may not be shut off without allowing an additional 30 days to pay beyond the normal bill date and provides additional protections for low-income customers.

Nebraska communities served by municipally owned natural gas utilities are not subject to regulation by the PSC and are not required to comply with the cold weather rule or the informational gathering related to docket NG-111/PI-237.

Customers having difficulty paying natural gas bills should contact their gas company to explore payment plans and assistance options. Customers can also

contact local public assistance agencies for help with natural gas bills.

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