

Winter heating costs expected to jump this year

As colder weather arrives and we turn up our thermostats, Oak Ridge Utility District customers can be assured that we are focused on providing them with safe, reliable, and affordable natural gas service. ORUD purchases natural gas at the lowest possible price and then passes this cost directly to customers. In addition, ORUD uses underground storage to take advantage of lower commodity costs by purchasing natural gas in the summer months (when commodity prices are traditionally lower) to withdraw later in the season and offset higher winter costs.

However, natural gas commodity prices are currently rising due to (1) higher demand as economies ramp back up, (2) lower than anticipated production caused by hurricanes and other disruptions, and (3) growth in US natural gas exports. An additional energy challenge for our customers is the prediction of a colder-than-normal winter season.

There are several ways you can conserve and save money by using energy conservation tips, tools, and assistance programs available to help prepare for higher winter bills. Now is a good time to make sure your household is prepared before cold weather hits!

- Set your thermostat at 68° or lower when you're home. Every degree below 68° can save four percent on your heating bills.
- Wear layered clothing and thick socks to keep warm; then set your thermostat even lower.
- At bedtime, lower your thermostat and add extra blankets.
- Lower the setting on your thermostat when leaving your home for four hours or more.
- Close garage doors, cover foundation vents, and close off vents and doors to seldom-used rooms.
- Keep curtains and blinds closed at night and on cloudy days; open curtains on sunny days for warmth.
- Place rolled-up towels inside against the bottom of exterior doors and window sills to block wintry drafts.
- Adjust your water heater temperature to 120° or "warm." It still provides hot water and avoids scalding. You can also lower it when it's not in use.

Many people in our community live with financial hardship. The elderly, disabled, unemployed, or people confronted by sickness or other financial setbacks are often unable to pay for the energy needed to run their homes. Programs are available to provide assistance for heating customer homes in the winter season.

- Aid to Distressed Families of Appalachian Counties (ADFAC) – Project SAFE helps pay the heating bill for individuals and families who are in emergency situations. Each request for emergency

funds will be reviewed by a staff member to ensure a fair distribution to people who qualify and need temporary assistance.

- Phone 865-483-6028

- Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) – This program helps keep families safe and healthy through initiatives that assist families with energy costs. These federal funds assist in managing costs associated with home energy bills, energy crises, weatherization, and energy-related minor home repairs.
 - Tennessee Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) | [Benefits.gov](https://www.benefits.gov)
 - Phone 866-674-6327