Commission Receives Update on Initiatives to Help Consumers Dealing with Price Spikes and Billing Problems

Con Edison to Fix Billing Practices to Smooth Out Dramatic Fluctuations in Commodity Prices

All Utilities Pushed to Further Improve and Refine Consumer Education and Outreach Efforts

ALBANY — The New York State Public Service Commission (Commission) today received an update from Commission staff on how the State’s major electric and gas utilities have responded to directives to increase their outreach and education efforts with New Yorkers regarding the recent surge in energy supply prices, and to identify ways to improve billing and price hedging practices to ensure they benefit consumers. This action comes in light of the national increases to utility bills as a result of the rising cost of natural gas.

“While neither the Commission nor the utilities can control supply prices, utilities can examine their hedging and billing reconciliation practices to reduce billing volatility and they can strengthen their communications to consumers to ensure they are aware of all of the State’s consumer protections and assistance programs that are available.” said Commission Chair Rory M. Christian.

On February 11, the Chair of the Commission wrote to Con Ed to direct them to improve its billing mechanisms to reduce dramatic changes in commodity price from month to month (an issue unique to Con Edison that exacerbated supply price volatility for their customers) and urged the company to improve communications with customers. On March 1, the Chair wrote to all utilities to strengthen communications. The utilities have responded to the Chair’s directives. For example, Con Edison, the state’s largest utility with 3.4 million electric and gas customers, filed an emergency tariff to fix its billing by the summertime in advance of any potential summertime increases in energy demand and potential supply price volatility.

The other major utilities, Orange and Rockland, National Grid, NYSEG, RG&E, National Fuel, PSEG Long Island, and Central Hudson, are reviewing their existing power supply purchasing to mitigate the risk of severe price volatility, refocusing their efforts to educate consumers regarding anticipated bill increases, and increasing outreach and education efforts to promote consumer payment assistance plans and programs to reduce energy usage.

The utilities will increase the frequency of their communications using a wide range of platforms such as press releases, bill inserts, newsletters, utility call center representative contacts (supported by additional training for these representatives), YouTube videos, and social media posts.
The utilities will continue to promote a range of programs that offer flexible payment terms and meaningful discounts, such as: deferred payment agreements, payment extensions, level payment plans and Energy Affordability Program discounts for low-income customers. The utilities will also communicate to customers the availability of bill assistance programs such as: the Home Energy Assistance Program, Emergency Home Energy Assistance Program, Regular Arrears Supplement, and the Emergency Rental Assistance Program. For more information on the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance's available assistance programs, visit: https://otda.ny.gov/programs/heap/.

As New York moves toward a greener, cleaner economy, Governor Kathy Hochul is making significant investments to diversify electricity fuel sources through renewables to decrease the state's reliance on fossil fuels and stabilize energy costs. Recognizing the magnitude of the climate crisis, Governor Hochul announced an ambitious renewable energy and jobs agenda in her 2022 State of the State address and Executive Budget proposal. This agenda includes the next offshore wind development solicitation; a $500 million investment for offshore wind port infrastructure and supply chain; achieving 2 million climate-friendly, electrified or electrification-ready homes by 2030; phasing out New York's dirtiest, polluting power plants; animating the market for new clean energy technologies like green hydrogen; and creating quality green jobs. These initiatives are expected to reduce price volatility over the long-term.

The Commission will continue to proactively warn customers of projected increases in supply prices, potential impacts to customers' utility bills, and the consumer protections and assistance programs that are available to assist customers with managing their energy bills. These efforts, in coordination with the state’s electric and gas utilities, will include press releases, newsletters, utility call center representative training, YouTube videos, and social media posts. For more information on available utility assistance programs including the Energy Affordability Policy utility bill discount program, please go to www.dps.ny.gov/winter.

Documents related to today’s discussion may be obtained by going to the Commission Documents section of the Commission’s Web site at www.dps.ny.gov and entering Case Number 22-00346 in the input box labeled "Search for Case/Matter Number". Many libraries offer free Internet access. Commission documents may also be obtained from the Commission’s Files Office, 14th floor, Three Empire State Plaza, Albany, NY 12223 (518-474-2500). If you have difficulty understanding English, please call us at 1-800-342-3377 for free language assistance services regarding this press release.

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