



California Public Utilities Commission
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PRESS RELEASE

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CPUC WORKS TO HELP MITIGATE HIGHER ENERGY BILLS UTILITY CUSTOMERS MAY RECEIVE DUE TO SHELTER AT HOME

SAN FRANCISCO, April 2, 2020 – The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) today announced actions it is taking to accelerate the use of its programs to help reduce the impact of anticipated higher energy bills due to many Californians staying at home in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“As Californians are practicing safe procedures and following the public health guidelines and Governor Newsom’s Executive Order by sheltering at home, it is likely that residential electric and natural gas usage will greatly increase, leading to higher utility bills,” said CPUC President Marybel Batjer. “Residential electric usage has increased 15 to 20 percent in recent weeks compared to the same period last year. The CPUC is taking action to ensure that this does not become an added hardship for people who have lost their jobs or are otherwise suffering economically due to COVID-19.”

The CPUC is seeking to accelerate the use of two current programs to reduce energy bills in April, May, and June, and will issue proposals to change how residential bills are calculated to reduce energy bills throughout the remainder of the COVID-19 crisis. The CPUC would approve the final changes in a May Voting Meeting to help reduce the impacts of bills in June, July, and August.

The immediate actions taken by the CPUC include:

- 1) Using the California Climate Credit to Reduce April Energy Bills: The Climate Credit is generated from a state program that requires power plants, natural gas providers, and other large industries that emit greenhouse gases to buy carbon pollution permits. The credit is a consumer’s share of the payments from the program. The credit is usually provided on



customer bills twice a year. The first for 2020 will be applied to April bills to help offset higher bills due to increased usage and will vary from \$20 to \$60 depending on the utility. Further, the CPUC has issued a proposal for comment (proceeding number R.11-03-012) that would accelerate the second Climate Credit so it would be available to consumers in May and June, which are likely to also be high usage months, rather than later in the year. Historically, Southern California Edison and Pacific Gas and Electric Company residential customers would have received the Climate Credit in April and October. Under the proposal issued today, available at <https://bit.ly/2X3NzZd>, residential customers would still receive the first credit in April but would now receive the second credit in two installments – in May and June. The proposal will be on the CPUC’s April 16, 2020, Voting Meeting agenda. The public can comment on the proposal at <https://bit.ly/2wW67zW>. Parties to the proceeding have five days to file comments. San Diego Gas & Electric’s Climate Credit for electric usage is already scheduled to appear on July and August bills and its natural gas Climate Credit will appear on April bills.

- 2) Ensuring Full Access to the CARE Rate Discount Program: The California Alternate Rates for Energy (CARE) program provides a 20 to 35 percent discount on utility bills. Many people who have recently lost their job due to COVID-19 will be eligible for the program. Customers just have to call their utility and ask to be enrolled. Information on participating in the program, including monthly income limits, can be found on the CPUC’s website at www.cpuc.ca.gov/General.aspx?id=976.

“Californians who are sheltering in place, many of whom are working from home, conducting school at home, and caring for children from home, are using more electricity than normal, and likely will face higher energy bills as a result. The Climate Credit proposal we issued today allows us to take a no-cost step to alleviate some of the financial impact to customers,” said Commissioner Liane M. Randolph, the assigned Commissioner to the proceeding that sets the Climate Credit.

“This crisis is a stark reminder that we all need basic utilities, especially when we fall on hard times, and the CPUC is doing all it can to protect that. It is also a time to remind ourselves of the importance of conservation practices in reducing our bills,” said Commissioner Martha Guzman Aceves.



The cheapest megawatt is the one not used. Consumers can reduce their bill impacts by taking some easy steps to conserve energy: turn down the thermostat, keep televisions and monitors on “eco mode,” unplug devices that are not in use, open blinds/curtains on sunny days to avoid using too many lights, and wait to use the dishwasher until it is full.

“In these unprecedented times, millions of ratepayers across the state will likely face higher energy bills from sheltering in place. We take seriously our responsibility to reduce this financial burden, especially for our most vulnerable populations,” said Commissioner Clifford Rechtschaffen.

“We know many are facing income challenges. In addition to the Climate Credit there are resources that can reduce energy bills, including the low income CARE program, which provides up to a 35 percent bill discount, the Family Electric Rate Assistance program, which provides an 18 percent discount, and making simple changes in home energy use,” said Commissioner Genevieve Shiroma.

For information on additional customer assistance programs, please visit www.cpuc.ca.gov/assistanceplans.

During this unprecedented pandemic the CPUC will continue to maintain public safety, ensure customer protections, oversee essential mitigation planning for the upcoming wildfire season, and perform all statutory functions using its full regulatory authority in a way that protects its valued workforce.

In response to the impacts of COVID-19, the CPUC is continuing to identify opportunities to help ensure that utility customers in California receive safe, reliable, and affordable utility services they need now more than ever. Steps the CPUC has taken thus far includes:

- **Moratorium on Utility Disconnections:** Ordered all CPUC-regulated energy, water, sewer, and communications providers to halt customer disconnections for non-payment. Utilities must also restore service to those whose service was disconnected prior to the CPUC’s March 17, 2020 order.



- **Suspended Renewal Requirements:** Ensured continued affordable access to communications and energy services by suspending renewal requirements for the low income programs CARE and the Family Electric Rate Assistance programs.
- **Protecting Contractors:** Ensured that large investor-owned utilities help ensure the economic stability of the large contractor workforce that provides energy efficiency upgrades to low income Californians.
- **Reliable Broadband:** Asked the largest wireless and Internet service providers to consider temporarily suspending data caps and data coverage charges if they have not already done so.

Read more about these actions and other steps the CPUC is taking to ensure utilities under its jurisdiction are supporting communities during these challenging times by visiting www.cpuc.ca.gov/covid.

For a list of consumer protection provisions utilities are enacting in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, please visit www.cpuc.ca.gov/covid19protections.

The CPUC regulates services and utilities, safeguards the environment, and assures Californians' access to safe and reliable utility infrastructure and services. For more information on the CPUC, please visit www.cpuc.ca.gov.

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