



## FLORIDA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

**Matthew M. Carter II, Chairman**

### Protecting Consumer's Pocketbooks by CONSERVING WATER AND ELECTRICITY

As Chairman of Florida's Public Service Commission (PSC), one of my main priorities is ensuring that residents' pocketbooks are protected from unreasonable costs for utility services. This year, National Consumer Protection Week (NCPW) is helping me highlight the need for residents to explore their financial security. *Financial Literacy: A Sound Investment* is the theme for the 10<sup>th</sup> annual NCPW, observed March 2-8, 2008.

Recognized nationwide, the week highlights protection and education efforts to help people master the financial facts of life. Education is the first line of defense for smart financial protection. Residents armed with information are more likely to make better decisions about managing money and credit and building a solid financial future.

At the PSC, we are educating residents on how to protect their finances by keeping their utility bills in check. Conserving both water and electricity is a key factor to lowering residential utility costs. Wise energy and water use at home will save money and help the environment. We can also help residents learn how to save money on their monthly phone bills, if they qualify for the Link-Up and Lifeline programs.

#### ELECTRICITY

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, you can reduce lighting electricity usage by 75 percent by replacing incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs. Typically, a 23-watt compact fluorescent bulb can replace a 90- or 100-watt bulb. Raising your thermostat just one degree in the summer can reduce cooling bills by two percent, and lowering your thermostat by just one degree in the winter can reduce heating bills by three percent.

##### *Other cost-saving energy tips:*

- ◆ In lamps and fixtures having two or more sockets, consider using a single large bulb in one socket rather than filling all sockets. A 100-watt bulb produces 50 percent more light than four 25-watt bulbs for the same amount of energy.
- ◆ Keep doors to unused rooms closed and close the room's heating vents and radiator valves.
- ◆ Draw blinds, shades, or drapes to block the sunlight during the hottest part of the day and make sure that drapes, plants, or furniture do not block registers for supply or return air.
- ◆ Locate the heating thermostat on an inside wall, away from windows and doors.
- ◆ Use the microwave oven instead of the large oven whenever possible.
- ◆ Never put a second refrigerator in the garage. Place a second unit in an air-conditioned room or your basement instead.
- ◆ Many energy companies offer on-site or internet-based home energy audits and/or incentives on efficient appliances. Call or e-mail your energy company to find out more.

#### WATER

Replacing washers on your dripping faucets can save 2,700 gallons of water per week. Repairing a pin-hole size leak in your hose can save 170 gallons of water a day. Eighty percent of in-home water use occurs in the bathroom. A full bath tub holds about 50 gallons of water. So, use less bath water, or take a shorter shower with a low-flow shower-head that uses only 2.5 gallons per minute.

##### *Other water-wise tips that curb costs:*

- ◆ Do not let the tap run constantly when washing dishes, brushing teeth, or shaving.
- ◆ Use the dishwasher only for full loads. Automatic dishwashers use 20 gallons of water per cycle regardless of load size.
- ◆ Use the clothes washer only with full loads and cold water.
- ◆ Top-loading washing machines use about three times as much water as front-loading washing machines.
- ◆ Store drinking water in the refrigerator, rather than letting the tap run.
- ◆ In the garden, group plants together based on similar water needs. Mulch around plants to retain moisture and reduce weeds.
- ◆ Place a shut-off nozzle on your hose to control water flow and turn water off at the spigot to reduce leaks.

#### TELEPHONE

Every Florida resident deserves to have a working telephone in their home. The phone is needed to keep in touch with family members, and more importantly, it's needed in times of emergency to call 911. The Link-Up Florida and Lifeline programs offer assistance to residents who can not afford phone service. Lifeline offers qualified residents a \$13.50 monthly discount, or \$162 annually, on their phone service. Link-Up offers up to a \$30 telephone installation discount for eligible residents who do not currently have a phone.

Link-Up and Lifeline are offered to applicants for programs administered by the Department of Children and Families. Last April, enrollment in the programs became easier through initiation of an automatic enrollment process. And as a result, customers participating in the Lifeline program increased 13 percent last year — the largest annual increase since the program's inception in 1995. In total, 164,626 Florida households participate in the Lifeline program.

Residents may be eligible for the programs if their household income is no more than 135 percent of the federal poverty income guidelines. This amount equates to an annual income of \$13,784 for a household of one; \$18,482 for a household of two; \$23,180 for a household of three; and \$27,878 for a household of four. Larger households should add \$4,698 for each additional person. Or, residents may be eligible if they participate in any of the following programs:

- ◆ Medicaid
- ◆ Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- ◆ Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Plan (LIHEAP)
- ◆ Federal Public Housing Assistance (Section 8)
- ◆ Food Stamps
- ◆ Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA)
- ◆ National School Lunch Program
- ◆ Bureau of Indian Affairs Programs

*National Consumer Protection Week helps the Florida Public Service Commission ensure that residents are armed with information to help make sound decisions that can save them money. I hope the tips in this article will help your Financial Literacy so that you can make a sound investment by conserving water and energy or taking advantage of the Link-Up Florida and Lifeline Assistance programs. For more information visit the Commission's Web site at [www.floridapsc.org](http://www.floridapsc.org).*