



*Matthew M. Carter II, Chairman*

## Help is Available to Curb Rising Utility Bills

*Those lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer. We watched the Summer Olympics, endured the unpredictable hurricane season, and bantered about the upcoming election. We also witnessed increasing fuel costs, and along with that, the rising price of groceries, gasoline, and utility bills. Our budgets are being stretched, and for many, making ends meet is not easy. My fellow commissioners and I want residents who are struggling to pay their monthly bills to know that help may be available. A number of programs help customers of electric utilities pay their bills when they just can't make those ends meet.*

Everyone is feeling the economic crunch, and many utility companies, as well as local charities, have programs available to assist Florida's residents. Customers experiencing economic hardship may contact their electric company to inquire about financial assistance for utility bills.

***The following are some of the programs available from the federal government and the state's five investor-owned utilities regulated by the PSC:***

The **Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)** is a federal, statewide program to provide home energy assistance. LIHEAP assists households that have incomes below 150% of the federal poverty level and need assistance to pay their power bills.

**Florida Power and Light's** program is called **Care to Share**. The program provides emergency assistance funds to customers who are in a crisis situation and unable to pay their electric bill. The funds are disbursed through local non-profit organizations.

**Progress Energy Florida** provides assistance through the **Energy Neighbor Fund**. The monies collected are distributed to needy customers through local aid agencies.

**Tampa Electric Company** offers a **62+ Plan**. Their program helps customers who are aged 62 or older work out payment options.

**Gulf Power** provides emergency assistance to customers who need help with energy bills, repairs to heating and air-conditioning equipment, and other energy-related needs. The programs assist the elderly, the disabled, the sick, and others who are experiencing financial hardship.

**Florida Public Utilities Company** will, on a case-by-case basis, offer extended payment options. The company also refers customers to agencies that provide assistance.

At least 18 municipal and cooperative systems throughout the state also have emergency assistance programs. For more information, visit your utility company's Web site or call the number provided on your utility bill.

Another way to help curb utility bills is through energy conservation. In addition to saving money, conservation preserves energy supplies. Most people do not realize how much energy they actually use and are often amazed that small changes can make a big difference in their electricity bill. Conservation is a personal responsibility that's easy to accomplish.

Here are some simple, helpful conservation tips from Consumer Reports:

- ◆ Replace an inefficient hot-water heater with an energy-efficient model. This step can reduce your energy costs by \$263 annually.
- ◆ Adjust your home's temperature by five degrees for eight hours while you sleep and 10 degrees while you are at work. This can save you as much as \$252 in annual energy expenses.
- ◆ Upgrade your inefficient systems and save up to 30 percent in heating costs.
- ◆ Buy appliances with the E.P.A.'s Energy Star label and you could receive at least 25 percent more efficiency.
- ◆ Seal and insulate your home's duct system and save up to \$811 annually in electricity costs.
- ◆ Put your computer to sleep, or even better, turn it off when not in use and save about \$46 annually. (And, note that screen savers do not actually save energy.)
- ◆ Replace five regular bulbs with compact fluorescents and save about \$40. Compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) come in all shapes and sizes and last from 5 to 13 times longer than standard bulbs.
- ◆ Have a home energy analysis to help manage rising energy costs and improve personal energy consumption, as well as household energy efficiency. Contact your utility to find out more about a home energy audit.

As costs continue an upward climb, using energy wisely will pay off. For more information on customer assistance programs in your area or for additional convenient energy efficiency measures, call the PSC's consumer assistance line at 800-342-3552 or visit our Web site at [www.floridapsc.com](http://www.floridapsc.com).