



an Enfinity Energy partner



Connections

Strengthening our Community...

one customer at a time!

February 2010

Mark your Calendars!

Stop by the Austin Utilities booth at the 36th Annual Austin Home & Vacation Show March 19th - 21st. Learn about our new "House Call" audit program and see what's new for 2010.

Also bring your Home Energy Report and receive a **Free LED night light.**

(Available while quantities last)

See you at the Show!

Austin Utilities Office will be closed Monday, Feb. 15, 2010 in observance of President's Day

Natural Gas Safety

Natural gas is great for heating, cooking and other uses in the home. It has an excellent safety record due to the physical characteristics of the gas itself.

Natural gas is made up of hydrocarbon gases, primarily methane, naturally occurring in rock formations deep below the earth's surface. The natural gas is withdrawn and transported to homes and businesses through an underground system of pipes.

Natural gas is colorless, odorless, lighter than air, and non-toxic. Breathing natural gas is not harmful as long as there is an adequate supply of fresh air to breathe along with it. Natural gas by itself will not burn, but with the proper mixture of gas and air combined with an ignition source combustion can occur.

An odorant that smells like rotten eggs is added to natural gas so that it can be detected. The odor is a warning that natural gas may be present and, if ignited, could result in personal injury or property damage.

If the smell of gas is present inside your home or business (no matter how faint or strong),

DO NOT:

- Smoke or strike a match
- Operate any electrical switches or appliance controls
- Pull any plugs from outlets
- Use a flashlight or lighter
- Use a telephone or cell phone from the building

If you smell a faint odor of natural gas inside your home or business, check to see if any appliances have been left on accidentally or if a pilot light has been extinguished, which would cause the odor (rotten egg).

If the odor persists, **TAKE NO CHANCES**, get out of the house immediately, then call Austin Utilities from a neighbors house.

If a **strong or persistent odor of gas** is present in your home or business, or if you hear a **hissing sound** of escaping natural gas, follow this procedure:

Get everyone out of the building immediately.

Leave the door open.

Use a neighbor's phone or cellular phone outside of the building to call us.

If you smell or detect natural gas outside, call us.

Keep Gas Appliances Operating Safely

Keep forced-air furnace filters clean. Clean the filter or replace them according to the manufacturer's recommendation. If your owner's manual recommends it, oil the furnace fan, motor and bearings. Keep your heat registers and cold-air returns clean so the air can flow properly. Also, arrange your furniture and drapes so they don't block the air flow.

Check the flue to make sure it is clean and open. Any fuel that does not burn completely can create harmful levels of carbon monoxide (CO). CO is a gas with no color, odor or taste. It can collect in your home if a fuel-burning appliance isn't working properly or venting as it should.

Have a qualified heating contractor inspect your furnace or boiler annually. A properly tuned furnace saves energy and helps avoid costly repairs.

Helping you learn how to use clean burning natural gas safely throughout your home is one of our top priorities.

Cold Weather and Ice Dams

Ice dams on your roof can lead to water damage inside your home. Preventing them may not be easy but it is usually much cheaper than repairing the damage they can cause.

Ice dams form when there is a heavy layer of snow on the roof and the warmth from the interior of the home escapes through the joints where the ceiling and walls meet. The underside of the snow melts, and the resulting water runs down the roof, where it is blocked by snow at the homes overhang. There is no warmth at the overhang, so a dam made of impenetrable ice forms. Water continues to build up behind the dam until the shingles are flooded.

Roof shingles are water-resistant, not waterproof, so the pooling water seeps in under the shingles, where it then accumulates on the ceilings, walls and overhangs of the home.

In northern states where ice damming is an annual event, roofing contractors install an ice shield -- basically a rubber membrane that adheres to the roof's sheathing. The shield is available in rolls 36 inches wide, and should be installed on at least the first six feet of roof decking.

In areas where high winds drive rain up and under shingles, an ice-shield barrier is often a good investment if installed over the entire roof's surface.

Another solution to the leaks from ice dams is to prevent the snowmelt that forms ice. A well-insulated attic, one that has insulation near the eaves of the home, does not release as much heat as a poorly insulated attic, thus preventing the melting of snow.

Is your meter covered?

Your meters and appliances could be affected by winter weather.

Heavy snowfalls, shoveling, or snow-blowing may cover your outside electric or natural gas meters with snow. This could affect the operation of the meter or appliance. It also makes the job difficult and dangerous for the meter readers.

Natural gas regulators have a vent to allow gas to escape, if the vent is blocked, gas flow into the home could be stopped or the regulator could get stuck and make very high gas pressures in your home. If an exhaust is blocked, the furnace or hot water heater could malfunction or stop working.

Austin Utilities suggest you clear snow around the meter and shovel a path to allow the meter reader access to your meters.

Big Appliance Rebates for Minnesotans in March

The Trade-in & Save Appliance Program, part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), will offer approximately 25,450 Minnesota homeowners a rebate for replacing their old appliance with a qualifying ENERGY STAR model purchased from a Minnesota retailer. **Rebates are not retroactive** for purchases made outside the program timeframe of March 1st - March 31st, 2010 and this rebate does not apply to commercial endeavors including rental properties.

Minnesota's allocation of \$5,009,000 includes rebates on:

- 6,035 clothes washers (\$200 rebate)
- 6,005 dishwashers (\$150 rebate)

- 1,999 freezers (\$100 rebate with purchase and "proof of demanufacturing"; \$50 for purchase only)
- 11,411 refrigerators (\$200 rebate with purchase and "proof of demanufacturing"; \$100 for purchase only)

Homeowners will be limited to one rebate for a single appliance purchase (maximum of \$200 per household). Once a reservation for a rebate is made, the resident will have 17 days to purchase, recycle and submit their rebate application.

The program-specific website www.mnappliancerebate.com will be launched February 1st (containing information only) until the rebate reservation system opens on March 1st.

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