Energy for Renters:

What You Need to Know

IN THIS GUIDE

Savings Steps
Save energy and money with simple tips

Understand Bills
Learn about your utility bills and common charges

Contacts & Chat
Get energy related help and talk to your landlord

Learn how you can save energy and money at home, who to contact for assistance, and how to understand your utility bill.

CERTs
CLEAN ENERGY RESOURCE TEAMS

My Energy Contacts

Fill in the names and contact information for energy programs & providers

Your Landlord

Your landlord can be your partner on energy. Discuss any issues you're experiencing with them.

Landlord: _____ **Phone:** _____

Electric and Natural Gas Utility

The utilities serving you may provide energy assessments, energy-saving devices, and rebates. They may also provide seasonal cost averaging, and refer you to local agencies for support.

Electric Utility: Find on bill, call city hall, or visit https://mn.gov/puc/consumers/utility.

Utility: _____ **Phone:** _____

Website: _____

Gas Utility or Delivered Fuel Vendor: Find gas at https://blueflame.org/whos-my-utility.

Utility: _____ **Phone:** _____

Website: _____

Energy Assistance Program

If you are having trouble paying your energy bills, the state Energy Assistance Program may be able to help with your energy expenses. Find your provider at https://mn.gov/commerce/consumers/consumer-assistance/energy-assistance/eap-provider.jsp

Provider: _____ **Phone:** _____

Website: _____

Weatherization Assistance

If you are having trouble paying your energy bills, Weatherization Assistance may be able to help reduce energy costs with insulation, heating, appliances, and more. Find your provider at https://mn.gov/commerce/consumers/consumer-assistance/weatherization/wap-providers.jsp

Provider: _____ **Phone:** _____

Website: _____

Citizens Utility Board

CUB can help you understand your utility bill or address related questions or complaints.

Phone number: 844-MINN-CUB (844-646-6282) **Website:** http://cubminnesota.org

Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs)

CERTs has a wide range of resources on energy efficiency and renewable energy.

Website: https://www.cleanenergyresourceteams.org

Saving Energy at Home

Simple tips for saving energy and money at home

To do: Swap in LED light bulbs

Lighting

Replace old-style incandescent bulbs and CFLs with LEDs and turn off lights when you are not in the room or when you can use natural light. Find the right bulbs using lighting guides available at cleanenergyresourceteams.org/lighting.

To do: Program the thermostat

Heating and Cooling

- In winter, set your thermostat at 68°F during the day, and lower it at night and when you are away. Open window curtains/shades during the day to let the sun help warm your home, and close them at night.
- In summer, set your thermostat at 78°F and use a simple box fan when in the room to reduce air conditioning costs. Close curtains and shades during the day and open windows at night to take advantage of "free cooling."
- Remember, don't try to heat or cool the outdoors! Close windows and doors when running the furnace or air conditioner. Also, make sure your air registers are clear of furniture or other obstructions so that air can circulate.
- Seal your home from cold winter drafts with plastic film on the windows and draft snakes, sweeps, and weatherstripping for doors. Close storm windows on doors and windows, too.

Avoid using electric space heaters. They are an expensive way to heat your home, and some are a fire hazard. If it's difficult to heat your home to 68°F without one, contact your landlord, utility, or the Weatherization Assistance Program to explore improvements to your heating system or insulation.

Saving Energy at Home

Simple tips for saving energy and money at home

Talk with your Landlord about energy

- Ask if there's been an energy assessment recently
- Ask for help installing a programmable thermostat
- Find out whose responsibility it is to change the furnace filter monthly and get the furnace serviced regularly
- If appliances are old or need replacement, request ENERGY STAR appliances that qualify for utility rebates
- Ask for help installing water-efficient faucet aerators and showerheads to reduce water heating costs
- Find out how to turn down the water heater to 120 F to reduce energy use and prevent burns

What is the Weatherization Assistance Program?
WAP improves the energy efficiency of homes of income-qualified households, including renters. From insulation to heating systems to appliances and more, WAP takes a "whole-house" approach to reducing families' energy costs and improving health and safety for renters and owners.

More tips

- Cook with your microwave or crockpot
- Wash your clothes with cold water and clean the dryer lint trap before every load
- Unplug electronics when not in use or use a smart power strip to do it for you

Ready to Take the Next Step?

- Find out if your utility provides energy assessments, rebates, or free energy-saving items.
- Check out the free Home Energy Guide and other efficiency resources on the CERTs website: https://www.cleanenergyresourceteams.org/home-energy-guide-tips.
- See if you qualify for weatherization assistance. Find your provider at https://mn.gov/commerce/consumers/consumer-assistance/weatherization/wap-providers.jsp.

Your Utility Bill

What's on Your Utility Bill?

Your electric and natural gas bills have several types of charges. Actual energy costs and items on bills can be different depending on your utility, but here are the basics.

Service Charge

The service charge is a flat monthly fee that you pay every month to have access to energy. Even if you do not use any energy in a given month, you will still be charged for access under the service charge.

Energy Charge

The energy charge on your bill is the cost of the electricity or gas you used. It is billed by kilowatt-hour (kWh) for electricity and therms for natural gas. Your utility reads your meter to determine the amount of electricity or natural gas used. You reduce your energy charge by using less energy!

1. **Understanding kilowatts (kW) and kilowatt-hours (kWh):** kilowatts are a rate of energy use; kilowatt-hours are a quantity of energy used. For example, a microwave might use electricity at a rate of 1 kilowatt (kW). If that microwave is used for 2 hours, it will use 2 kilowatt-hours (kWh) of electricity.
2. **Understanding therms:** therms are a unit of heat. One therm is equal to approximately 29 kWh and can be provided by about 97 cubic feet of natural gas.

Riders

Many utilities also include "riders" on your bill. Riders are charges for specific aspects of your utility service, such as the cost of fuel. Riders may be based on how much energy you use or they may be a flat monthly fee.

Taxes

Finally, taxes on your bill vary based on where you live. Taxes may be flat fees or variable.

How Much Is Your Utility Bill?

The average Minnesota family of four uses about 800 kWh of electricity each month and pays around $100. Natural gas bills vary more widely but are typically $100-$200 per month.

If you are paying a lot more than this, you may be able to find ways to become more efficient and save money. There may also be an error on your bill.

Know Before You Rent!

Ask to see recent utility bills so you know how much they might cost.

What utilities does the house or apartment have? If there is more than one unit in the building, are there individual energy meters for each unit or is there one shared meter?

- Electric
- Natural Gas
- Delivered fuels (propane or fuel oil)
- Other?

Who pays the utilities: renter or landlord?

Explore or ask about the energy efficiency of the house or apartment.

Does it have a programmable or smart thermostat to save energy?

What types of appliances does the unit have?

	System Age	Last Serviced	Fuel Type	Location	ENERGY STAR?
Space Heating					
Air Conditioning					
Water Heating					
Range/Oven					
Dishwasher					
Refrigerator					
Washer					
Dryer					

Windows: Are windows single, double, or triple pane? Are there storm windows and screens? If there will be children present, are windows secured against falls?

Is the building well insulated and air sealed, or are there gaps and drafts?

Are the following safety measures in place and in working order?

- Smoke detector
- Carbon monoxide detector
- Fire extinguisher
- Lead tested and abated if needed
- Radon tested and abated if needed

Energy Emergencies

What to Do if Your Heat Stops Working

Contact your landlord. MN law requires that landlords maintain rental properties so that they are "fit to live in" and "kept in reasonable repair."

What to Do if Your Utilities are Shut Off (or you are behind on payments)

If your landlord pays your utilities:

Contact your landlord to alert them that utilities need to be paid. If your landlord still does not pay, you or a group of tenants may pay the utilities and deduct the payment from your rent.

- Notify your landlord in writing that you plan to pay the utilities if they are not paid within 48 hours. If it is winter and the heat is not on, a shorter time period is acceptable. (You may notify the landlord orally, but you must also send a written notice within 24 hours.)
- If the utilities are not reconnected in that time, a tenant may pay the amount due for the most recent billing period. Submit a copy of the receipt to your landlord with your rent. You may deduct the amount paid from your rent payment.
- If you live in a building with 5 or fewer units, you or another tenant may establish an account in your name, pay the monthly utility bill, and submit a copy of the receipt with your rent payment each month.

NEED LEGAL HELP?

Contact HOME Line at homelinemn.org or 866-866-3546

If you pay your own utilities:

Minnesota's Cold Weather Rule (CWR) is a state law that protects you from having your electric or natural gas service shut off between October 15 and April 15. If you are behind in paying your electric or natural gas bill, contact your utility company to find out if you qualify for CWR protection, and to sign up.

CWR protection is only available to residential customers. All natural gas and electric utilities must offer CWR protection. To have CWR protection, you must set up a payment plan and keep it. If you don't keep the payment plan you may be disconnected. You can set up a CWR payment plan any time during the CWR season. The utility must set up a payment plan that is reasonable for your household circumstances. You are eligible for CWR protection as a renter, but the utility account must be in your name and affect your primary heating source. If you and your utility can't agree on a payment plan, contact the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission at 800-657-3782, or email consumer.puc@state.mn.us and they can help you work with your utility.

Website: https://mn.gov/puc/consumers/shut-off-protection

More Resources

Renter 101

This FREE online class provides information on the rental process and related skills:

- How to manage money resources wisely to pay rent on time every month
- How to choose adequate, safe and affordable housing
- How to communicate effectively
- How to maintain a home
- How to navigate rental process (screening, lease agreements, security deposits, moving out)

https://extension.umn.edu/courses-and-events/renter-101-online-course

Landlords and Tenants: Rights and Responsibilities

This useful document is from the MN Attorney General. It provides details on legal rights and responsibilities relating to housing rentals.
English: https://www.ag.state.mn.us/brochures/pubLandlordTenants.pdf
Español: https://www.ag.state.mn.us/brochures/pubLandlordTenantsSpanish.pdf

HOME Line

A nonprofit Minnesota tenant advocacy organization that provides free and low-cost legal, organizing, education, and advocacy services so that tenants throughout Minnesota can solve their own rental housing problems. https://homelinemn.org or 866-866-3546

Minnesota Housing

MN Housing is the state's housing finance agency. If you need help finding or paying for rental housing, check out the resources on their website. http://www.mnhousing.gov/sites/np/renters

Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs)

CERTs is a statewide partnership with a mission to connect people and their communities to the resources they need to identify and implement community-based energy efficiency, renewable energy, and electric vehicle projects. https://www.cleanenergyresourceteams.org

About This Series

CERTs CLEAN ENERGY RESOURCE TEAMS

This guide is part of a series designed to answer common home energy questions.

- Energy for Renters: What You Need to Know
- Energy for Landlords: What You Need to Know
- Energy for Manufactured Homes: What You Need to Know
- Energy for Single-Family Homes: What You Need to Know

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