Helping Our Community Through a Pandemic

COVID-19 has likely had an impact on every person and business in our community. In prior newsletters we reported ways we are connecting with the community by supporting food pantries, blood drives and meals on wheels. We also reported how we are keeping our employees and customers safe through social distancing practices in the field and office.

This month we’d like to share some actions we have taken to provide some relief to our customers and local business members. We have postponed late fees and have continued to defer disconnects for non-payments since March. These changes represent savings to customers through RATEs and FEEs reductions of $299,142.

We have experienced a slight reduction in customer usage during the pandemic compared to our 5 year usage averages. To accommodate for the customer reductions and related revenue loss for the utility, we have made budget adjustments in the amount of $831,000.

COVID-19 has given us reason to accelerate plans we had in place that would allow customers to do business with us remotely without having to come to our office. We are finalizing testing for online applications, a customer chatbox on our website, and have made improvements that allow more access to programs like budget billing.

Austin Utilities is a public utility and we are here to benefit the community. Our hope is we will recover from COVID-19 and get back to business as usual soon. Until then please know that your public utility is here to serve you and we are always working on ways to improve that service. If you are struggling to pay your bill, please call us. We are here to assist you.

COLD WEATHER RULE

The Minnesota Cold Weather Rule protects a residential utility customer from disconnection due to non-payment from October 15-April 15 when the disconnection would affect the primary heat source for the residence and the following conditions are met:

1. The household income is at or less than 50 percent of the state median income.
2. Verification of income by the local energy assistance provider or the utility, unless the customer is automatically eligible for protection against disconnection as a recipient of any form of public assistance, including energy assistance, that uses income eligibility in an amount of or below the income eligibility.
3. A requirement that the customer receives referrals to energy assistance, weatherization, conservation, or other programs likely to reduce the customer’s energy bills and
4. A requirement that customers who have demonstrated an inability to pay on terms provided for that purpose by the utility, and who make reasonably timely payments to the utility under a payment plan that considers the financial resources of the household and cannot be accepted by the utility service from October 15 – April 15. A customer who is receiving energy assistance is deemed to have demonstrated an inability to pay.

The Austin Utilities Board of Commissioners

Monthly Meeting was held on August 11th, 2020. Agenda items included:

- AU cost of service and rate study results
- Propane plant improvements
- COVID-19 financial implications

Meeting minutes are available at www.austinutilities.com.

NOTICE

In compliance with the Code of Federal regulation #49, Part 192.16, Austin Utilities must notify each customer who owns buried natural gas piping after the meter:
1. Austin Utilities does not maintain the customer’s buried piping.
2. If the customer’s buried piping is not maintained, it may be subject to the potential hazards of corrosion and leakage.
3. Buried gas piping should be:
   (a) periodically inspected for leaks.
   (b) periodically inspected for corrosion if the piping is metallic.
4. If any unsafe condition is discovered.
5. When excavating near buried gas piping, the piping should be located in advance, and the excavation done by hand.
6. Austin Utilities and plumbing and heating contractors, can assist in locating, inspecting, and repairing the customer’s buried piping.

Customers with buried natural gas piping should feel free to contact Austin Utilities at 433-8886. You can also find information at www.austinutilities.com.

Virtual tour of the AU facility

Come inside virtually and see what we do every day to provide safe and reliable services to our customers. Relax and enjoy the tour from the safety of your computer or smart-phone. Videos will be available on our website.

Tips for Winter Readiness

- LED bulbs last longer and save energy, which will save you money!
- Find it using our daily clues and win a new EnergyStar dehumidifier. Clues posted daily at 9 a.m. on our Facebook page and website beginning on Monday October 5th.
- We’re hiding a model sized replica of an AU service truck. Find it using our daily clues and win a new EnergyStar dehumidifier. Clues posted daily at 9 a.m. on our Facebook page and website beginning on Monday October 5th.
- We’re hiding 10 utility truck icons on our website. Send an email to Talk2AU@AustinUtilities.com letting us know where you find them for a chance to win one of ten AU warmth kits.
- We’re donating a refurbished truck to a worthy non-profit organization to provide safe and reliable services to their community. Stay tuned for the winner announcement.
- Tips for Winter Readiness

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic we are moving our activities online for the safety of our customers and staff. We hope you will have fun engaging in the virtual activities. Follow all events at www.austinutilities.com.

You must be a customer of Austin Utilities to earn prizes.

Kid’s Experiment Activity

Have your kids complete a fun energy-related experiment (instructions provided by AU). Send a photo of your kiddos during or after the experiment to Talk2AU@AustinUtilities.com and we’ll mail them a thank you package including a treat coupon from a local business.

All Customers - Stop in the office during the month of October and receive a free LED 3-way bulb. LED bulbs last longer and save energy, which will save you money!
Austin is about to get a little greener

Austin Utilities is planting electric vehicle (EV) charge stations in a few locations in our community. Government agencies, utilities, automakers and technology providers are working hard to establish plug-in electric vehicle charging networks to support the growing EV wave nationwide. The MN Department of Transportation, MN Pollution Control Agency and Great Plains Institute have developed a vision to become the leading state for plug-in electric vehicle use in the Midwest with strategies for achieving the goal of powering 20 percent of the light-duty cars in the state with electricity by 2030.

One of the barriers to EV adoption is that a majority of consumers cite range anxiety as their primary reason for avoiding purchasing an electric car. As your local electric energy provider, we are doing our part to relieve this anxiety by installing more charge stations. The charge stations are part of a bulk purchase by our wholesale provider Southern MN Municipal Power Agency, to promote the future of electric vehicles. In all, we will be adding three more dual charge Level 2 charge stations which can take a few hours to fully charge a vehicle, and one DC Fast Charge station which can charge a vehicle in less than one-hour. One station will be located in the municipal parking lot at 1st Street and 3rd Avenue NE, one at the AU office building, and the final Level 2 Charger with DC Fast Charge at a yet to be confirmed location but likely in the shopping areas off 18th Avenue NW. EV drivers will pay a fee to charge their vehicles, much like the way drivers of internal combustion engine vehicles pay a fee to fill their cars with gas.

Why is Austin Utilities interested in electric vehicle charging?

Implied by the name, electric vehicles (EVs) use electricity instead of gas for fuel. Most experts agree the use of EVs will increase steadily over time to help reach national and state goals to promote clean energy technologies and cleaner air. We look forward to the growth in electric sales, but EV charging can have an impact on the reliable delivery of power if charging is done during peak usage times or if neighborhood transformers are overloaded. We can make sure there is enough power supply available to power your vehicle without impacting power at your home or business by being proactively involved in the installation of charge stations. Just another example of AU making Connections for Better Living.