

energy

CONNECTIONS

October 2009

NorthWestern
Energy
Delivering a Bright Future

in this
issue....

BALANCING YOUR ENERGY BILL
IS EASY

DON'T LET VAMPIRES LURK IN
YOUR HOME

WEATHER THE STORM

DID YOU KNOW?

Hunt Safely

As hunting season gears up, NorthWestern Energy would like to remind hunters to report any signs of power line vandalism to the authorities. While NorthWestern crews are constantly patrolling and monitoring the condition of our power lines, hunters are in remote areas that aren't always the easiest to access. While out scouting, you might notice damage to our equipment that we aren't yet aware of.

Be on the lookout for damaged insulators, power lines, transformers or poles because they could result in power outages, fires and severe injury. Remember to treat any line (whether it is lying on the ground or hanging low) as if it is energized and stay far away.

Even if you think somebody else already has called, you should always report signs of damage to authorities immediately. ■



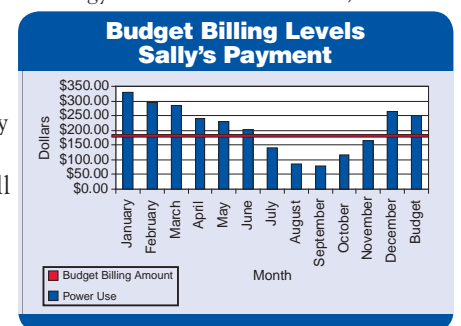
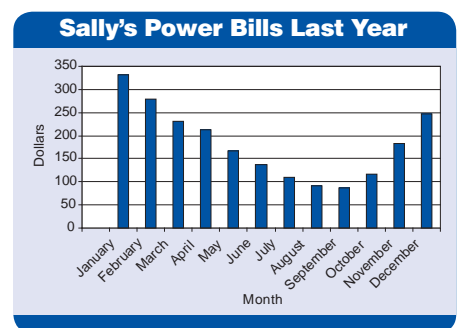
Balancing Your Energy Bill is Easy

Balancing your budget can be a juggling act, but with NorthWestern Energy's Budget Billing program, you can spread heating and cooling costs over the entire year. Budget Billing amounts are calculated based upon your past 12 months of usage and the rates currently in effect. NorthWestern Energy will review your Budget Billing amount periodically to prevent a large overpayment or underpayment from accumulating on your account. Changes may be necessary in your Budget Billing amount due to an increase or decrease in your usage patterns and/or current market prices.

How does it work?

Let's look at one example, so you can see if Budget Billing is right for you.

- ◆ In January, Sally's natural gas and electric bill was \$330.74. In July, her bill was \$110.75. To reduce the large differences between her monthly payments, she decided to enroll in NorthWestern's Budget Billing program in August. Sally's bills over the previous 12 months averaged \$188 each month, which became her Budget Billing payment for September.
- ◆ Sally continued to pay approximately \$188 each month for the rest of the year even though she used more power in some months and less in others (see chart at the right). In November, Sally had a baby and had to increase the setting on her programmable thermostat to keep the house a bit warmer for the new baby. Eventually, between a substantial increase in supply costs and the additional usage, the difference between the Budget Billing amount Sally paid and her actual charges was \$181. (If Sally had chosen to withdraw from Budget Billing at that time, she would have had to pay this amount, called the "true up," to NorthWestern Energy when she un-enrolled.)
- ◆ NorthWestern re-calculated her average bill to adjust for the changes in supply costs and in usage over the year. Sally's "true up" was \$181, so her Budget Bill amount increased by \$61 to \$249. By enrolling in Budget Billing, Sally knows approximately how much she will be paying each month on her energy bill.



Enrolling is easy!

Is Budget Billing right for you? If so, call our Customer Contact Center to sign up. An account representative will be able to calculate your budget bill amount and sign you up. You can also calculate what your budget bill amount would be by logging on to our Web site at www.northwesternenergy.com and search for budget billing calculator.

Eligibility

All residential customers are eligible for the Budget Billing program. However, your account must be current and in good standing to qualify. ■

Don't Let Vampires Lurk in Your Home

An unseen guest in your home could be the Energy Vampire. The Energy Vampire, also referred to as phantom load, lurks in all electrical outlets where electronic equipment or appliances are plugged into the wall. Even if your equipment is turned off, the Energy Vampire is still at work quietly sucking the energy from everything you've left plugged in.

Some electronics or appliances go into a sleep mode or on a standby setting, which continues to pull a current even though you might think you turned a device off. In fact, many of the most common electronic devices in your home stay on even if you think they're off.

Rest assured, to kill this vampire, you don't need a stock of silver bullets or stinky garlic – you simply need to pull the plug. That means when you're done with your coffee pot, microwave, hair dryer and other devices, disconnect them totally from their power sources.

Besides the TV, which can draw 12 watts of electricity even after you flick off your favorite show, the biggest standby energy hog is the home computer and its suite of devices. Here are some clues to identify your energy suckers:

- ◆ They're appliances with remote controls, such as TVs, VCRs and audio equipment.
- ◆ They feature a continuous digital display – like those glowing clocks on stoves.
- ◆ They feature rechargeable batteries, such as cordless phones, laptops, cell phones, or iPod chargers (which use energy even after the battery is charged).
- ◆ They're appliances with external power supplies, such as inkjet printers and desktop computers.

Sometimes it's difficult to combat vampires because these days we have more and more gadgets we like to plug-in. One easy solution is to use a power strip. *Step 1:* Plug all components of a computer or home entertainment system into a power strip. *Step 2:* Turn off the power strip with a single switch. Anything plugged into the strip now is truly turned off.

Unplug rarely used appliances – why pay to power the flashing clock? Ditto for chargers that aren't in use. Unplug the TV, toaster oven and other often-used appliances before you leave on vacation (or more frequently). If it's not plugged in, it can't suck energy.

Lastly, remember to buy energy-efficient appliances bearing the ENERGY STAR® label. That way, at least your vampires will suck away less energy. ■



contact...

MONTANA

Customer Contact Center	
7 a.m. - 6 p.m. M-F	(888) 467-2669
Emergency 24/7 Service	
Electric	(888) 467-2353
Natural Gas	(888) 467-2427
Call Before You Dig	811
Energy Efficiency	(800) 823-5995

NEBRASKA

Customer Contact Center	
6 a.m. - 10 p.m. M-F	(800) 245-6977
Emergency 24/7 Service	(800) 245-6977
Call Before You Dig	811

SOUTH DAKOTA

Customer Contact Center	
6 a.m. - 10 p.m. M-F	(800) 245-6977
Emergency 24/7 Service	(800) 245-6977
Call Before You Dig	811

PAYMENT

Automated Phone	
Payment Option:	(800) 218-4959
(via checking, savings, or money market account)	
SpeedPay Automated	
Phone Payment Option:	(877) 361-4927
(via credit card account)	



Weather the Storm

Throughout our service territory, storms can brew up quickly, at any time of year, bringing dangerous high winds, snow and ice.

Keep these storm safety guidelines in mind when Mother Nature strikes.

- ◆ Have an emergency safety kit handy: flashlights, radio, clock, batteries, fire extinguisher, blankets and pillows.
- ◆ Keep emergency numbers posted by the phone, and always have a corded or cellular phone on hand.
- ◆ Call your electric company to report an outage.
- ◆ Listen to the radio for service restoration updates.
- ◆ Avoid using candles, and never try to heat a room with a gas appliance.

If a storm causes damage in your neighborhood, use extreme caution during cleanup. Downed or damaged power lines can remain energized and send an electrical current through tree limbs and especially metal fences. ■

did you know?

Our utility operations are subject to various federal, state and local laws and regulations concerning service areas, tariffs, issuances of securities, employment, occupational health and safety, protection of the environment and other matters.

On a Federal level, NorthWestern is regulated by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). FERC is an independent agency that regulates the interstate transmission of electricity, natural gas, and oil. FERC also reviews proposals to build liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals and interstate natural gas pipelines as well as licensing hydropower projects. The Energy Policy Act of 2005 gave FERC additional responsibilities including regulating the transmission and sale of natural gas for resale, ensuring the reliability of high voltage interstate transmission system, overseeing environmental matters related to natural gas and hydroelectricity projects and major electricity policy initiatives, plus much more.

In addition to FERC, NorthWestern Energy is regulated on a state-by-state basis. To get details on how the utility is regulated in your state, log-on to www.northwesternenergy.com and search for regulatory. ■