

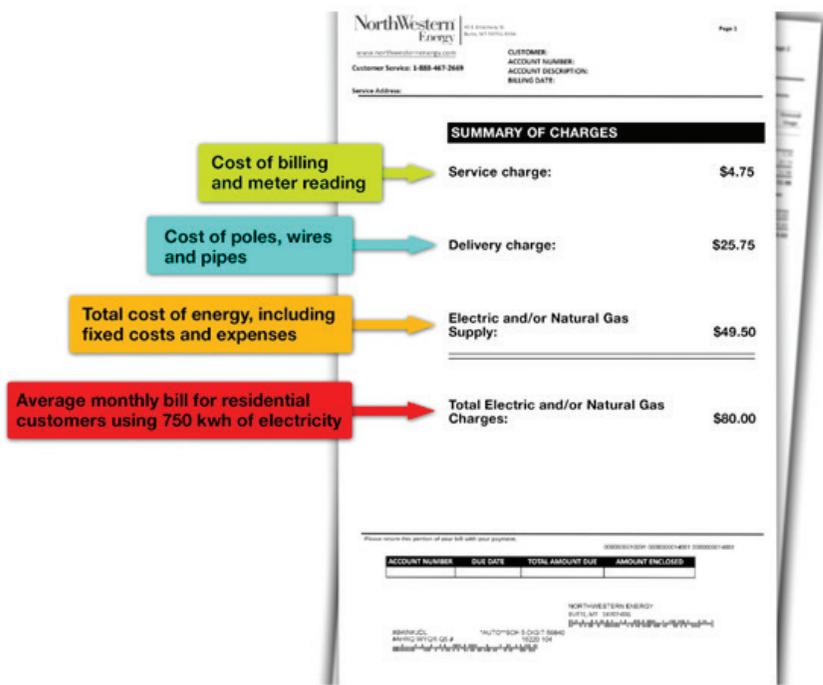


# ENERGY CONNECTIONS

JANUARY 2015 - MONTANA

## Understanding your bill

Utility bills can be complicated – with all the abbreviations, jargon, regulatory requirements and tiny print – it’s no wonder that most customers only look at the amount that is due each month. Yet the more you know about your energy use, the better you’ll be able to help manage it.



Several factors affect your energy bill. These include customer type (residential vs. business), location-based fees and taxes, fuel costs, seasonality, and energy usage. Some of these factors, such as fuel costs, change frequently.

We are a regulated utility. This means that our rates can only be changed – increased or decreased – with approval from state public utility commissions. Utility commissions in Montana, Nebraska and South Dakota oversee our rate structure and set rates they believe serve the public interest.

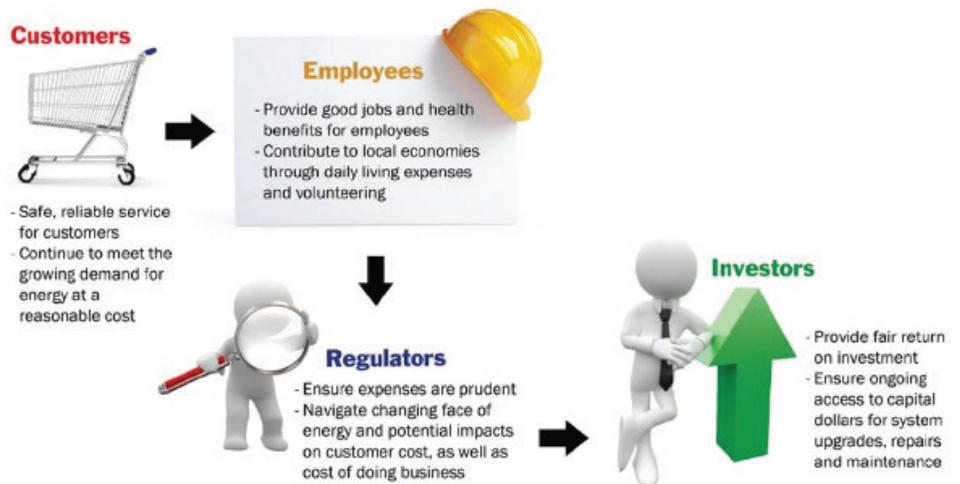
We provide electric, natural gas and limited propane service in Montana, South Dakota and Nebraska. Standard residential service is available to any customer for domestic purposes while living in a single private residence, multiplex, townhouse, condominium, etc. Rates include a basic service charge per month as well as a delivery charge for the cost of providing the service to your home or business.

## How do we manage costs?

We invest in the future. The cost of delivering safe, reliable energy includes maintaining a vast network of pipelines, power poles and towers, substations and gate stations and the equipment needed to operate and maintain these systems. Some parts of our infrastructure are the same as when we installed them. Although they are still functional and safe, they might be many decades old.

Just as you work to maintain the value and usefulness of your home, we work to ensure our energy system is ready to meet your needs today and in the future. You might replace the roof on a building before it leaks and causes damage. We are replacing hundreds of power poles before they cause a significant issue in energy delivery. We incur the same kind of maintenance expenses you do.

We are investing millions of dollars into our system every year so we can provide safe, reliable service for customers now and in the future. While we work hard to keep costs as low as possible, we also have a legal commitment to do our best to make certain your lights and heat come on when you need them. Keeping this promise to you requires us to put money into our system.



# What is net metering?

The growth and future of home-based electric generation is a significant topic in Montana. A number of bills are likely to be introduced this legislative session to make changes to Montana law regarding the purchase of electricity from consumers who produce it, typically with small-scale solar-panel installations or wind turbines. In general, this practice of home generators selling electricity back to NorthWestern Energy or other utilities is called “net metering.”

What does net metering mean? Customers with solar panels or a wind turbine can generate electricity that feeds their home or business. When they generate more than they need, the electricity can be fed back through the power grid to the utility, in essence allowing the customer’s electric meter to spin backwards, reducing or in a few cases eliminating most of their bill.

How long has Montana had net metering? The Montana Legislature approved net metering in the 1990s. Currently, the law applies only to large utilities, including NorthWestern Energy, and their customers. The current law limits net metering to facilities of less than 50 kilowatts in size.

How many people take advantage of the net metering law in Montana? About 1,300 NorthWestern Energy customers, residential and businesses, take part in net metering. About 1,200 of those customers use solar panels to generate electricity.

To learn more facts about net metering, visit our website: [NorthWesternEnergy.com](http://NorthWesternEnergy.com).



# Is your meter all clear?

Be sure to remove any accumulations of snow or ice from the meter in the winter. Please do this gently and never use an open flame. After major snow storms, it is a good habit to get in, to take a walk around your property and ensure all vents are free and clear and none are blocked by snow or ice.



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