



Senior Legal Hotline

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SENIOR LEGAL FACT SHEET

Special Programs for Reduced Energy Rates

The soaring costs of electricity and natural gas have caused severe financial hardship for millions of Californians statewide. Following are some of the programs offered by California utilities that can reduce your bills. **If your energy provider is not listed, call your local utility to see if similar programs and services are available.** If you have trouble reaching your local utility, the Senior Legal Hotline may have current information.

Many of these programs are offered only to low-income and/or to elderly or disabled customers. Typical maximum income levels are \$2,608 a month for one or two people, \$3,067 for three, \$3,700 for four (these are for PG&E CARE program). Exact numbers and conditions vary, however, and are subject to change. You may, however, qualify for more than one of these programs at the same time.

Electricity and gas discounts for low-income customers – exact discounts vary

PG&E's CARE program: (800) 933-9555

Southern California Edison: (800) 736-4777

SMUD (Sacramento area): (866) 675-6624

Southern California Gas: (800) 331-7593

Roseville Electric: (916) 774-5623

San Diego Gas and Electric: (800) 411-7343

Sierra Pacific: (800) 782-2506

L.A. Water & Power: (213) 481-5411

Electricity discounts for life-support equipment users

SMUD's Life Support Program offers a discount of up to 50% on a portion of electricity usage. Call (888) 742-7683. **PG&E** has a similar program – call (800) 743-5000. Other areas, call your local power company.

Help with paying bills

HEAP (Home Energy Assistance Program) provides once-a-year assistance for income-eligible customers. Contact the California Department of Community Services and Development, (866) 675-6623, for referral to an agency in your area. This federally funded program may be used in addition to any non-federal energy assistance program.

REACH, through the Salvation Army, offers urgent, once yearly assistance in paying energy bills to people who have received cutoff notices. Because this program is partly funded by utility shareholders, however, funds are extremely limited at this time. Call (800) 933-9677.

Energy Efficiency Programs

Many utilities offer a variety of free and discounted assistance to customers enrolled in their low-income programs. For renters, the homeowner must agree. Assistance may include an energy

Please turn the page

audit, insulation, weatherstripping, minor home repairs, low-flow shower heads, compact fluorescent bulbs and appliance replacement. Funds are limited and there may be waiting lists. **PG&E** customers call (800) 933-9555 for the Energy Partners Program. **SMUD:** (916) 732-5659. Other utilities have similar programs. Call yours for information.

Third-Party notification

Many utilities have programs under which customers can ask to have a friend or relative notified in case a bill is not paid in time. This can help prevent cutoffs or other problems if you are afraid you might forget or misplace the bill, or might be away from home for a time due to illness. Call your local utility for information.

Energy Conservation Tips

IN WINTER: Turn down the thermostat. For every degree you lower the heat in the 60-70° range, you'll save up to 5 percent on heating costs. If health conditions permit, turn the heat off at night or set it to 55 degrees. **Capture the sun's heat.** Open drapes and blinds on south- and west-facing windows on sunny winter days. Close them at night to retain heat inside.

IN SUMMER: Turn up the thermostat 2-3 degrees or use a fan or swamp cooler. Turn the air conditioner off when not at home. **Block the sun's heat.** Use outside window coverings or awnings to block the sun. Open windows at night for natural cooling if it is safe to do so.

Select energy saving building materials. If you're renovating or upgrading, get reliable advice on energy-smart methods, such as light-colored or white roofing materials, appropriate windows, attic exhaust fans, etc. And plant trees!

Eliminate wasted energy. Turn off lights in unoccupied rooms. Use night lights to illuminate rooms instead of flipping on a switch. Turn off kitchen and bath ventilating fans after they've done their job. Keep the damper closed when a fireplace is not in use. Unplug non-essential appliances, such as an old dustbuster or extra refrigerator in the garage. Turn computers and printers off when not in use.

Reduce hot water temperature. Unless the owner's manual for your dishwasher requires a higher temperature, set your water heater to "normal" or to 120°.

Take shorter showers. Showers account for two-thirds of home water heating costs. Cutting your showers in half will reduce your water heating costs by 33 percent.

Install low flow showerheads and faucets. These can cut hot water expenses by 15 percent.

Plug leaks. Install weatherstripping or caulk leaky doors and windows and install gaskets behind outlet covers. You could save up to 10 percent on energy costs.

Wrap the water heater with an insulating jacket. This is especially valuable for older water heaters with little internal insulation.

Replace furnace filters once a month and tune up your furnace. Dirty filters restrict airflow and increase energy use. A clean, properly adjusted furnace can save up to 5 percent.

Use compact fluorescents. Replace incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescents in high-use light fixtures. They use 75 percent less energy and last much longer.

If you are over 60 in California, you can get free advice by phone from the Senior Legal Hotline regarding your questions about energy rates and conservation, or about any other legal issue. Hours of operation are Mon.-Fri. 9 to 12 and 1 to 4, and until 7 p.m. on Thursdays. You can also submit your question by e-mail from our web site, www.seniorlegalhotline.org.