Office of the Ohio
Consumers' Counsel

Your Residential Utility Consumer Advocate

CONSUMERS' FACT SHEET

ENERGY CHOICES AVAILABLE TO CONSUMERS:

ENERGY CHOICE 101

Consumers are contacted by energy marketers on the phone, at the door, and in the mail. It's common in Ohio because consumers have an energy choice: who will supply my electric and natural gas? The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC), the residential utility consumer advocate, has resources to help consumers make these energy choices.

Consumers are not able to choose the company that delivers their utilities, but consumers can choose who supplies their electric or natural gas. Consumers of investor-owned utilities that are current with their utility bills are eligible for energy choice programs. Electric choice is offered to consumers of AEP Ohio, Dayton Power and Light Company, Duke Energy Ohio, and FirstEnergy Utilities. Natural gas choice is offered to consumers of Columbia Gas of Ohio, Dominion East Ohio, Duke Energy Ohio, and Vectren Energy Delivery of Ohio. Energy choice is not available to consumers of municipal power systems, members of co-ops or participants in the Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP Plus).

1. Energy choice
As part of energy choice, consumers can purchase utility service from a certified marketer. Consumers that have chosen a marketer will pay the marketer for the actual cost of the utility and pay their local utility company for delivery and distribution.

Before enrolling in a marketer's contract, consumers should compare the rate offered by the marketer with the "Standard Choice Offer" on their natural gas bill and the "Price to Compare" on their electric bill. If consumers are on a local utility's budget billing plan, they should contact the marketer for information about their options.

If a consumer chooses to accept a marketer's contract, the new marketer will notify the consumer's local utility. The marketer will also typically send information to consumers about its company and contact information. The local utility will send the consumer a confirmation notice and give consumers seven days to cancel the marketers' contract. Seven days after the confirmation notice, enrollment will take place. After enrollment, most consumers will see the marketer's charges separately identified on their monthly utility bill.

Continued on back

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The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC), the residential utility consumer advocate, represents the interests of 4.5 million households in proceedings before state and federal regulators and in the courts.

The state agency also educates consumers about electric, natural gas, telephone and water issues.

For more information, please visit the OCC website at www.occ.ohio.gov.

The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel is an equal opportunity employer and provider of services.

2. Governmental aggregation

An alternative energy choice is to join a government aggregation group. Ohio law allows people or organizations to pool consumers together as a buying group for the purchase of utility services. The aggregator will enter a contract with a certified marketer on behalf of all members in the group. Some aggregators have joined together to create even larger buying groups, like the Northeast Ohio Public Energy Council (NOPEC) and the Northwest Ohio Aggregation Coalition (NOAC).

There are two methods of enrollment. "Opt-out" aggregation automatically includes each consumer in the aggregation unless the individual decides not to participate. "Opt-in" aggregation requires each consumer to agree to participate in the program before being included in the aggregation. Consumers have 14 to 21 days to respond to their method of enrollment.

Before enrolling, consumers should compare the aggregator's rates with the Standard Choice Offer and the Price to Compare. Aggregators may possess greater bargaining power than individual consumers and may negotiate for group benefits or better rates.

Like accepting a marketer's offer, the aggregator will notify the consumers' local utility if the consumer chooses to participate, and the local utility will send the consumer a confirmation letter in the mail. Seven days after the confirmation notice, enrollment will take place.

Consumers should open any mail from aggregation groups, local governments and marketers to learn about aggregation opportunities. Visit the OCC's aggregation web page for more information, www.occ.ohio.gov/aggregation.

3. No choice

Consumers always have the option to stay with their local utility company. Their local utility will continue to supply the consumers' utility service at their Standard Choice Offer or Price to Compare. The local utility rate may be the most economical choice, especially in the case of natural gas, because participation in energy choice does not guarantee savings.

Making your choice

For more information about energy choice, visit the OCC's website, www.occ.ohio.gov, and look for fact sheets about "Comparing Your Electric Choices," "Comparing Your Natural Gas Choices," "Consumer Protections in Energy Choice" and "The Basics of Governmental Energy Aggregation." There are also webpages devoted to comparing your natural gas and electric choices.

The following list of questions will assist you as you shop for an energy supplier:

- Is there a fee to sign up?
- Is there a fee to switch if I decide to go back to my local utility company or decide to switch to another energy supplier?
- How long is the agreement?
- How much will I pay (the rate) for energy?
- Is there a fee to cancel my agreement?
- At the end of my agreement, will it automatically renew?
- Will I receive two bills, one from the supplier and one from my utility company, or just one bill?
- If I have a billing problem, who should I contact?
- What are the terms and conditions of the agreement? (Always obtain, and keep, a copy of the agreement.)
- What happens if I decide to move before the agreement expires?
- When will my service from the energy supplier begin?
- When will the supplier's charges for energy appear on my bill?