

We have answers to your energy questions.

Mississippi's winters have been relatively mild the past few years, so many folks may not remember the effect freezing temperatures have on their electricity use. This winter has been drastically different, however, leaving Southern Pine Electric Power Association members more concerned about their electric bills. Here are some commonly asked questions:

Why was my bill so high in January and February this year?

South Mississippi winters are usually mild, but temperatures this December and January were much lower than average. There were several consecutive nights—and days—when temperatures barely climbed above freezing. Southern Pine customers saw higher electric bills. Some doubled or even tripled. Typically, heating and cooling the average home accounts for about half of the cost on consumers' electric bills. Heaters in most homes worked overtime for several weeks and that meant increased use, therefore, increased costs.

Has Southern Pine increased the rates on my bill?

No. In fact, Southern Pine customers saw an approximate 7 percent decrease. Monthly bills are higher because of electricity use related to colder than normal temperatures.

How did cold weather affect my energy use?

For the first 12 days of January, temperatures only rose above the 50 degree mark for two days. The remaining days were well below the 50-degree mark, with the lowest temperature recorded this year on Monday, Jan. 11, at 15 degrees. Again, this means heating systems have been working hard, increasing the amount of energy used.

The increase in energy use is linked to the amount of insulation in a home, the efficiency of that home's central heating and cooling system, the temperature setting of the thermostat, the temperature setting on the water heater and several other factors. Members who have mobile homes, homes built prior to 1965 or homes that use electric resistance strip heat and space heaters as the primary heat source saw even greater increases in kilowatt-hour use.

What can I do to manage my use?

Obviously, it is impossible to control the weather, but there are several ways that electric customers can manage their use. From sealing windows to changing light bulbs, our Web site at www.spepa.com has lots of tips for members. Interactive features and calculators demonstrate savings customers can have if they make a commitment to energy efficiency.

Southern Pine marketing representatives also work with members to see what improvements can be made in their homes and daily routines to help modify and manage use. Call any of our offices for information on energy efficiency.

What is kilowatt-hour use and where is it located on my bill?

Your kilowatt-hour use is the difference between last month's and this month's meter readings. It is located on your monthly billing statement in two places: It's in the center of your bill between the multiplier and the bill amount, and it's also in the historical data box located in the upper right section of the bill. Southern Pine implemented a new bill format in January to provide members a simple, easy-to-read monthly statement.

How can I get help paying my electric bill?

Congress has greatly increased funds to help needy, qualified families in Mississippi with their utility bills through the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). If you need help, and think you qualify, please speak with your local community action agency. This is a government service. There is no charge to find out if you qualify. Funds are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

Energy assistance contact information by county:

Copiah County (601) 894-4745
Covington County (601) 765-4871
Forrest County (601) 544-1394
Jasper County (601) 787-4844
Jefferson Davis (601) 792-5356
Lawrence County (601) 587-4370
Newton County (601) 683-2733
Rankin County (601) 825-1309
Scott County (601) 469-3061
Simpson County (601) 847-4611
Smith County (601) 782-9578

The American Red Cross, The Salvation Army, local churches and private community organizations also are available to help.

If I need further help on my bill, what else can I do?

Timely communication with our office is key. Call our office for assistance and a customer service representative will be happy to work with you and make payment arrangements.

How do I know when my bill is due each month?

Your Southern Pine bill is due upon receipt. The "subject to disconnect" date is printed on the billing statement. The bill should be paid before this date to avoid disconnection.