

HINTS FOR HOMEOWNERS

Finding Help With High Energy Costs

(NAPSA)—Natural gas is used to heat 52 percent of America's homes. It's the most popular form of home heating because it's also clean, efficient and reliable.

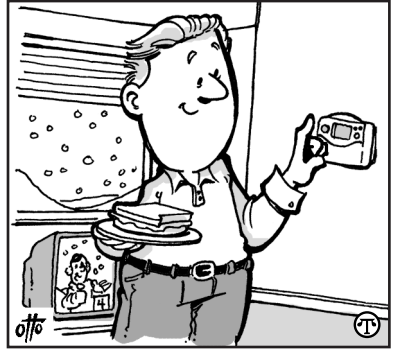
This year prices are expected to rise an average of 47 percent, with prices for oil, electricity and propane also expected to rise. Utility companies are doing everything they can to give their customers an adequate supply of natural gas at a stable price.

Natural gas utilities have taken a number of actions to stabilize natural gas prices and help consumers deal with fluctuations in their energy bills:

- **Billing plans**—Most utilities offer balanced-billing plans that allow customers to spread their natural gas costs over many months, which makes it easier for people to handle winter heating bills.

- **Storage**—Natural gas utilities often purchase natural gas during warm-weather months and store it for use on cold winter days. Many utilities use underground storage areas (such as salt caverns or depleted aquifers), while some others use above-ground tanks that store natural gas in a super-chilled, condensed form known as liquefied natural gas.

About 15 to 20 percent of the total natural gas consumed during the winter comes from storage and storage can account for half of



Various tools are used by gas utility companies to stabilize gas prices.

some utilities' natural gas supplies on winter's coldest days. This dedication to reliable service has been a hallmark of natural gas utilities for decades.

- **Hedging**—More than half of the states let utilities use financial tools such as futures contracts to stabilize natural gas prices. Seventy percent of the gas utilities surveyed by the American Gas Association plan to use such financial instruments to stabilize prices during the 2005-2006 winter.

- **Contract terms**—Just as homeowners shop around for food and household items, utility gas supply managers obtain natural gas from a variety of sources and under different contract terms.

For more information, visit the American Gas Association at www.aga.org.