

Taking Control of Your Energy Costs

by Jeffrey Mayer

(NAPSA)—This summer, Americans find themselves facing yet another oil shortage, with prices at the pump approaching record highs. The U.S. Energy Secretary recently said that the climbing gas prices are a “crisis” for the country and “families are hurting.”



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The facts are inescapable, and we can't afford to sit around hoping that prices will drop—the waiting period might never end. We are grappling with an increasingly severe energy crisis that

promises long-term consequences for all, especially families and small businesses. Now more than ever, consumers need to be made aware of every option available to them that could provide protection from steeper energy bills in the future.

It often seems like there is nothing we can do during times such as these. After all, how can we stop buying gas for our cars? We still need to get to work, take our kids to school, and run our daily errands. Simply put, we cannot stop living. We also cannot rely on government to come up with a plan that will soften the bite that energy costs take out of our wallets. However, there is something we can do. We can make wise and informed decisions about how we consume energy in our homes.

Last winter, millions of homes and businesses that rely on natural gas for their energy needs saw their bills climb as natural gas prices rose. This was due in large part to the effects of Hurricane Katrina, which disrupted the operations of approximately 20 percent of our natural gas supply. If we had actually experienced a rough winter, natural gas prices could have been double or triple what we saw.

While we are obviously unable to control unpredictable factors such as geopolitical crises, natural disasters or unusually cold winters, something we can take direct control over is our heating bills. Energy suppliers are finally giving homeowners and small business owners the tools to do what large companies have done for years: control the financial impact of energy volatility.

Today, prices for natural gas are at their lowest levels since Katrina hit the Gulf Coast nearly a year ago. Given the volatile nature of energy prices, now is an excellent time for consumers to take control of their energy bills by choosing their energy providers and enrolling in fixed-rate plans that lock in long-term price protection. Many companies offer plans that allow for rates to be locked in for two or even three years. By signing up for a fixed-rate plan, customers are insuring themselves against future increases in natural gas prices. If history is any guide, this is one of the most sensible things a consumer can do to lessen the financial impact of the constantly fluctuating demand for energy.

In the long run, the threat of rising energy costs underscores the need for a more concerted effort by energy suppliers to educate families and small business owners about options that will allow them to take control of their own energy bills. By taking action to lock in rates, consumers can protect themselves from future energy crises that are likely to put a severe strain on their pocketbooks or cut into profit margins. Taking control will allow them to sleep a little easier knowing that they are in charge.

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Editor's Note: MXEnergy is a leading provider of natural gas and electricity to hundreds of thousands throughout the United States, serving customers in FL, GA, IL, IN, KY, MA, MD, MI, NJ, NY, OH and PA.