

“Cold Temperatures Don’t Have to Lead to High Heating Bills”

Denise Everson, Family and Consumer Sciences Agent

706.769.3946 * deverson@uga.edu

As temperatures drop across the state, many families are turning on their heat to fight the winter chill. According to the US Department of Energy, Americans spend more than \$160 billion a year to heat, cool, light, and live in our homes, which is about 21% of the national demand for electricity and natural gas. But rising prices for heating fuel can place a huge financial burden on families.

UGA Cooperative Extension is committed to helping our communities save valuable energy resources and protect their family budget. One of the ways we are able to do this is by providing education to natural gas customers on natural gas deregulation, bill literacy and energy conservation.

Jackie Dallas, UGA Energy Educator, is available to provide educational programs and work one-on-one with individuals to address their energy needs and questions. According to Jackie, “If you are one of the nearly 4,000 natural gas customers in Oconee County, you could experience a little sticker shock over the next two months. The Georgia Public Service Commission has issued a news release warning natural gas customers to expect an increase of about 24 percent in their heating bills this winter. February is historically Georgia’s coldest month which means heating bills are the highest in late winter.

What can you do to ease the impact of the coldest time of the year? Start by reviewing your natural gas bill, especially if you pay by bank draft or if you are on budget billing and haven’t closely examined your bill recently. If you are on a variable rate plan, you can change your rate plan or marketer at no charge once every 12 months. For a comprehensive list of marketers and rate plans, visit the Georgia Public Service Commission website (www.psc.state.ga.us/gas/priccard.asp). If you do an internet search of natural gas marketers, you will see many links to sites that do not list all of the marketers eligible to serve in the deregulated Atlanta Gas Light service area.

If you are on a fixed rate, check the date when your fixed rate is scheduled to end. If you locked in to a rate last summer, chances are good that you are paying 20 percent to 30 percent more per therm than rates that are currently being offered. Historically, summer is not the best time to lock in to a fixed rate. Locking in during September or October can save you the most money. You should start looking for a new rate plan about two months prior to the expiration date of your fixed rate.

Confused? You don’t have to be. You can receive one on one bill education from the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension. Stop by the Oconee Extension office on January 28 or 29 from 9 am to 11 am to discuss rate plans and your bill. If those times are not convenient, please contact Jackie Dallas, Energy Educator, at 706-543-3788 to

schedule an appointment or fax your bill and contact information to 706-613-3533. You will receive a follow up phone call.”

Keep your house warm this winter without putting a strain on your family budget.

For more information about family and consumer sciences topics, contact the Oconee County Cooperative Extension Office at (706) 769-3946 or stop by our office located behind the Oconee County Courthouse.