

# NEWS



*A NiSource Company*

801 E. 86th Avenue  
Merrillville, IN 46410

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

March 10, 2006

## **FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Tom Cuddy, Manager  
NIPSCO Communications  
219-647-6556

### **HEATING CUSTOMERS WHO NEED ASSISTANCE HAVE MORE OPTIONS THAN EVER AS WINTER MORATORIUM ENDS**

**MERRILLVILLE, IN** – Northern Indiana Public Service Company (NIPSCO) officials today remind low-income customers that heating bill assistance is available as the March 15 conclusion of the state’s moratorium approaches.

Between Dec. 1 and March 15 – known as the “moratorium” – utilities in Indiana will not disconnect service to customers enrolled in the state’s Energy Assistance Program (EAP) and who are delinquent on their home heating bills.

“There are more programs in place today to help low-income customers and customers facing hardships pay their heating bills than at any time in the recent past,” said NIPSCO President Mark Maassel.

Among the programs available to help customers are:

- **State Energy Assistance Program** – provides qualifying families with incomes up to 150 percent of the poverty level with bill assistance and crisis assistance. The Indiana Family and Social Services Administration administers EAP. Since Nov. 3, more than 39,000 customers have applied for funds. Of that, a total of 16,432 customers have received more than \$3.9 million in assistance from EAP.
- **Winter Warmth Program** – provides qualifying families with incomes up to 150 percent of the poverty level with bill and deposit assistance. In addition, assistance is available to customers facing a medical and/or financial hardship. Since Aug. 1, more than 5,900 customers have received more than \$1.6 million in assistance.

**-more-**



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- **Gift of Warmth** – provides assistance to qualifying customers with incomes at or below 150 percent of the poverty level that have received a disconnect notice. NIPSCO makes a dollar-for-dollar match to contributions offered toward the program. During the 2004/2005 heating season, more than 1,218 customers were provided \$185,000 in heating bill assistance.
- **Help Thy Neighbor** – provides families with incomes between 151 percent to 200 percent of the federal poverty level who have received a disconnect notice with bill assistance. Eligible households will receive up to \$200 in immediate utility bill assistance. Call NIPSCO DirectLink at 1-800-4-NIPSCO (1-800-464-7726), Monday through Friday, 7:00 am to 5:00 pm CST. After the greeting, select option 1, enter your NIPSCO account number, and select Help Thy Neighbor. Since the Jan. 3 launch of Help Thy Neighbor, more than 1,700 NIPSCO customers have received more than \$340,000 in assistance.

“Our goal is to keep our customers connected and we’re focused on helping low-income customers,” said Maassel. “It’s critically important to call NIPSCO at the first sign of payment trouble and before service is disconnected.”

At a minimum, NIPSCO initiates the following steps before any disconnection of service occurs:

- Beginning this month, NIPSCO will mail disconnect notices separately from the bill.
- NIPSCO will attempt to telephone each customer within three to five days ahead of the scheduled disconnect date; and
- NIPSCO may attempt another call one day prior to the disconnect date to offer customers payment or energy assistance options to help avoid disconnection of service.

More information regarding these programs can be found at [www.nipsco.com](http://www.nipsco.com) and entering the DirectLink e-Services suite.

NIPSCO, with headquarters in Merrillville, Ind., is one of the 10 energy distribution companies of NiSource Inc. (NYSE: NI). With nearly 712,000 natural gas customers and 445,000 electric customers across the northern third of Indiana, NIPSCO is the largest natural gas distribution company, and the second largest electric distribution company, in the state. NiSource distribution companies serve 3.7 million natural gas and electric customers primarily in nine states. More information about NIPSCO is available at [www.nipsco.nisource.com](http://www.nipsco.nisource.com).

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