



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

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**NIPSCO SEEKS REGULATORY APPROVAL TO CONTINUE  
WINTER WARMTH PILOT PROGRAM**

**MERRILLVILLE, Ind.** – Northern Indiana Public Service Company today announced it has filed with the Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission (IURC) a plan to continue its Winter Warmth energy assistance program.

The program, which requires IURC approval, could provide up to \$7.9 million in natural gas bill and deposit assistance to persons with low incomes or those experiencing financial hardship. The money is administered by social service agencies throughout NIPSCO's service area.

“The need for targeted energy assistance programs like Winter Warmth will be even greater this year because of the high cost of natural gas,” said NIPSCO President Mark Maassel. “This program will help customers with limited or fixed incomes stay safe and warm in their homes this winter heating season.”

As submitted, NIPSCO would contribute up to \$900,000 of its own funds toward the Winter Warmth program, while residential customers would pay approximately \$0.65 per month to fund the program. The program is designed to supplement existing energy assistance programs such as the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

Last year, Winter Warmth directed more than \$5 million in bill and deposit assistance to more than 14,000 customers. If approved by the IURC, the Winter Warmth program would become effective Dec. 16, 2005, through Dec. 31, 2007, resulting in no discontinuation of the program.

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One of the unique aspects of the program is the ability for social service agencies to provide assistance to families and individuals who have hardship cases, such as an illness, job loss, or a breadwinner who has been called up for active military service.

"The Winter Warmth program has been a godsend to the people of Michigan City," said Denita Ton, community services director of the Salvation Army in Michigan City, Ind. "It has allowed hundreds of families to stay warm during the coldest winter months. Because of the worsening economy and hundreds of more needy families, it is our hope that the Winter Warmth program will be approved again this year. The health and well being of less fortunate people depends on this program."

As submitted to the IURC, a snapshot of the program follows:

- For the balance of 2005, remaining funds will be dedicated to providing deposit assistance to help restore services to customers presently disconnected;
- Qualifying customers would be able to apply for the program at one of 26 existing energy assistance agency sites across NIPSCO's service area;
- Expand eligibility to customers with incomes up to 150% of poverty level.
- Customers may receive a one-time benefit per heating season of up to \$450;
- Customers may qualify for a reduced deposit only once in a 12-month period;
- Deposits for low-income customers would be reduced to one-twelfth of the annual estimated bill for that customer;
- Winter Warmth recipients would be required to enroll in NIPSCO's BudgetPlan, which spreads bills out evenly over 12 months;
- If a customer is dropped from NIPSCO's BudgetPlan by missing more than three payments in 12 months, the customer would not be eligible for Winter Warmth program funds; and
- Allocate \$750,00 of Program funds for low-income weatherization.

NIPSCO, with headquarters in Merrillville, Ind., is one of the 10 energy distribution companies of NiSource Inc. (NYSE: NI). With over 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.com](http://www.nipsco.com).

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