

Oregon CUB

610 SW Broadway
Suite 400
Portland, OR
97205

(503)227-1984
oregoncub.org
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CUB Mission:

As directed by Oregon voters in 1984, Oregon CUB represents the interests of Oregon's residential utility customers before administrative, judicial, and legislative bodies.

Inside This Issue:

CUB Fighting Largest Rate Hikes in Decades Pg 1

Low-Income Rate Programs Pg 2

CUB Reduces PGE Rate Hike Pg 2

2022 CUB Board Election Pg 2

No More Subsidies for the Gas System Pg 3

Your Impact This Spring Pg 3

Preparing for Wildfires & Power Outages Pg 4



The Bear Facts

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF THE
OREGON CITIZENS' UTILITY BOARD

Summer 2022

CUB Fights Largest Rate Hikes in Decades

a letter from Bob Jenks

Dear Members,

Almost every day, Oregon utilities are coming in with requests to raise your bills. With historic inflation, rising energy prices and utility bills are daunting. Thankfully, CUB is up for the task.

This year, we have seen request after request from utilities looking for more money from Oregonians.

Just after we post information about Pacific Power's 14 percent rate hike request, the utility requests an additional 4 percent. Last fall, NW Natural customers saw a 13 percent increase. This year, the utility is requesting an additional 12 percent bump.

CUB successfully cut PGE's requested rate hike by \$70 million.

All told, customers of the largest utilities are facing double digit rate increases by next year. Pacific Power customers could easily face increases of more than 20 percent. We haven't seen price hikes this severe in 20 years.

But CUB is fighting back. Our advocates are working tirelessly to stand up for customers like you. CUB analysts are picking apart utility requests. CUB lawyers are crafting strong arguments to protect customers' budgets. CUB advocates are working with community groups to create utility policies that work for all Oregonians.

And CUB is winning! We successfully cut Portland General Electric's requested rate hike by \$70 million. With our partners, we are helping develop programs to lower bills for low-income customers. No matter what utilities throw at us next, we'll be ready.

Your support makes this work possible. Thank you for your donations, your letters to regulators, your voice at public hearings, and for staying informed. Together, we can make a better future for Oregon utility customers.



Sincerely,

Bob Jenks
Executive Director, Oregon CUB

Low-Income Rate Programs Coming for Oregon Energy Customers

Oregon's low-income households will soon have access to energy bill discounts directly from their utilities. Thanks to CUB's advocacy, energy utilities will offer discounted rates for qualified customers.

Utilities are now developing interim low-income programs. Portland General Electric's interim program launched in April. Customers of Pacific Power, Cascade Natural Gas, Avista, and NW Natural will see programs roll out this fall.

Low-income customers tend to spend more of their incomes on utilities. And they are more at risk of having to choose between paying for utilities and other necessities like food or medicine.

Financial pressure on Oregonians has risen dramatically

in the COVID pandemic era. CUB helped lead the way to address these challenges by passing 2021's Energy Affordability Act. This law allows utility regulators to consider household income in setting rates.

Beyond this year's interim solutions, utilities are working on permanent income-based rate programs to roll out in 2023. CUB is working with regulators and the utilities to develop permanent programs that lower energy bills for those who most need relief. The programs will also be informed by input from advocates and environmental justice communities.

CUB will keep working to ensure that these programs are effective and energy becomes truly affordable for all Oregon utility customers.



*Thanks to CUB's advocacy,
energy utilities will offer
discounted rates for qualified
customers.*

CUB Reduces Portland General Electric's Rate Hike

Last year, PGE requested an \$80 million rate increase for customers. After months of CUB advocacy, we successfully reduced this year's increase down to only \$10 million.

In a major CUB victory, PGE agreed to eliminate deposits for its residential customers. PGE formerly charged deposits to some new customers and customers who are having difficulty paying their bills. Deposits contribute to energy burdens and housing insecurity while doing nothing to improve service. This is a huge change in how PGE will do business and a big win for customers.

PGE customers may also see a refund because of CUB's advocacy. In 2020, PGE closed the Boardman coal plant but did not remove it from rates. CUB requested that this money be investigated. Regulators approved our request and ordered PGE to refund customers if it made unauthorized profits after Boardman's closure.

CUB's efforts here made a big difference for customers. Slashing bill increases by \$70 million and eliminating deposits are major wins for Oregon households.

But the work is not done. PGE customers are still facing bill increases for costs associated with wildfires, COVID-19, and last year's ice storm. CUB will continue to advocate for PGE customers in these upcoming fights.

2022 CUB Board Election

Are you interested or have experience in energy or telecommunications policy? Experience or interest in nonprofit board management, fundraising, or HR? Expertise or aptitude in social media and outreach? Are you committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion? 2021 is an election year for the CUB Board of Governors.

For more information on board openings, responsibilities, and the application process, contact CUB Operations Manager Thomas Jerin at thomas@oregoncub.org or 503-227-1984. Candidates should contact us no later than August 30 to ensure that they comply with conflict of interest and other requirements, and can meet the filing deadline.

No More Customer Subsidies for the Gas System

Dear CUB Members,

Right now, natural gas utilities are asking Oregon households to pay for adding new customers to the gas system. As our state moves to reduce climate pollution, this is expensive and risky for gas customers. **We need your help to end these expensive gas subsidies and clean up Oregon's energy system.**

Donate today to help stop risky gas subsidies!

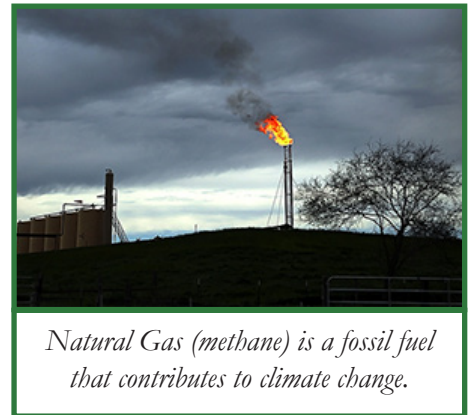
Gas utilities want to keep expanding their systems to grow their profits. Existing customers pay for adding new gas customers, anywhere between \$2,400-2,875 per building. Oregonians shouldn't be on the hook for millions of dollars in subsidies each year to the already wealthy oil and gas industry.

Growing the gas system is a risk for existing customers. With the state's new climate programs, gas companies need to reduce their emissions, not add more. Natural gas (methane) is a fossil fuel that contributes to climate change and is subject to climate regulation. As more customers are added and the cost of reducing emissions goes up, so will bills.

We need your support to protect Oregon households, NOT add more costs to gas bills

Right now, gas utilities do not have financially viable plans to meet climate goals. With no realistic plans, customers will pay the price for both subsidies and rising costs of meeting emissions regulation.

Donate today to help CUB push for policies that protect your wallet and the environment. Your support will allow us to advocate for customer interests as Oregon transitions to clean energy.



Natural Gas (methane) is a fossil fuel that contributes to climate change.

Your Impact This Spring, By the Numbers

271

Comments sent to regulators by CUB members

8

CUB members testified at rate case hearings

18

News Pieces on Rate Cases

\$87.6 Million

Dollars saved for customers in the first half of 2022

Thank You for Showing Up

Over the past few months, CUB members have gone above and beyond to advocate for clean and affordable utilities. With Oregon's largest utilities pushing to raise bills, your support has been incredibly powerful.

You have spoken out, sending hundreds of comments to utility regulators. You have shown up, attending public hearings to fight bill increases. And it's working!

Before this year, utility regulators rarely heard from customers. Now? They're all ears and working to make it easier for your voice to be heard.

While CUB's staff may be small, we know that our thousands of members make all our voices louder together. Thank you for joining us to fight for utilities that work for all Oregonians.



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Preparing for Wildfire Season and Power Outages

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In recent years, Oregon's summers have become longer, drier, and hotter, leading to historic wildfires. Oregon's electric utilities are now preparing for this year's fire season, tracking weather patterns and shutting down electricity when needed. As a last resort, public safety shutoffs may be used to prevent wildfire spread and reduce costs for customers.

Shutting off power during fire season is itself a public hazard. Shutoffs can interrupt cell phone service and delay emergency response. Many people need home cooling and electricity access to manage medical conditions. Shutoffs are particularly hazardous when they coincide with extreme heat waves.

Not all areas are subject to these preventative outages. Only customers in certain high-risk zones will see public safety shutoffs. Contact your electric utility for more information about high-risk zones and safety shutoffs.

How should you prepare for wildfires?

- Make sure your electric and gas utilities have updated contact information for your household.
- If someone in your household has a medical condition that requires power, contact your utility to obtain a medical certificate.
- Prepare for the event of a wildfire evacuation or outage by developing a plan and having food, water, and medical supplies ready.
- Download the FEMA app, which will send you real-time emergency alerts, and sign up for emergency notifications with your local city and/or county.
- If you are able, consider managing plants, wood piles, and debris 30 feet around your home to establish a defensible space.