



Consumer Chat

The Newsletter of the Ratepayer Advocate

1999 Achievements of The Division of the Ratepayer Advocate

As the year 2000 begins, it is an opportune time to look back on our many activities in 1999.

The Division of the Ratepayer Advocate helped shape historic legislation that will provide consumer discounts and competition in the electric and natural gas industries.

Electricity Discounts- In February 1999, the Electric Discount and Energy Competition Act was signed by Governor Christine Todd Whitman. This legislation provides for competition and rate reductions for electric consumers, as of August 1999.

Natural Gas Discounts- Beginning Jan. 1, 2000, New Jersey households can shop and purchase natural gas from a supplier other than their local utility company.

The Ratepayer Advocate also made strides toward our mission to make certain that telecommunications, cable television, and water services will be provided to customers at reasonable rates.

For complete details of the Division of the Ratepayer Advocate's 1999 achievements, please request a copy of our 1999 Annual Report.

Telecommunications - The Ratepayer Advocate was active on state and federal levels in promoting competition in order to secure lower prices and advanced services for all ratepayers.

Cable Television- The Ratepayer Advocate helped win millions of dollars in cable rate refunds for TCI cable customers. The Division also reached a \$27.7 million settlement agreement with the BPU Cable Television Staff and Cablevision to refund monies to cable customers in 13 counties statewide.

Water and Wastewater- The Ratepayer Advocate was active in representing consumers in ten water rate cases. In an effort to mitigate rate increases for construction of water treatment plants to comply with clean water standards, the Division proposed phase-ins over several years.

**Blossom A. Peretz, Esq.,
Ratepayer Advocate
State of New Jersey
Div. of the Ratepayer Advocate
31 Clinton Street, 11th floor
P.O. Box 46005
Newark, NJ 07101
Tel. (973) 648-2690
Fax (973) 624-1047
e-mail: njratepayer@rpa.state.nj.us
<http://www.njin.net/rpa>**

LIHEAP Can Help with Your Heating Costs

With the cold weather season upon us, the Division of the Ratepayer Advocate encourages qualified consumers to apply for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). This is a federally-funded program designed to help consumers in need of financial assistance pay for heating costs.

LIHEAP helps households and individuals with their energy expenses. In New Jersey it is operated jointly by the Department of Human Services and the Department of Community Affairs. Benefits are provided in the areas of: heating assistance, medically necessary cooling assistance, and emergency crisis heating assistance. Households found eligible for LIHEAP are protected against utility shut-offs between November 15 and March 15 based upon the New Jersey Winter Termination Program.

Households receiving food stamps may receive automatic heating benefits through their County Welfare Agency. Eligibility for the program is based on total household income. Gross monthly income limits are set at 150% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.

LIHEAP applications and Emergency LIHEAP applications are being accepted through February 28, 2000. Applications are available from various community based organizations. For more information call the LIHEAP Hotline at **1-800-510-3102**.



Winter Heating Tips



Try these tips in your home this winter to stay warm and lower your bills:

- Set your thermostats to the lowest temperature that still keeps you comfortable. Cost: Nothing!
- Open drapes or blinds to let the sunshine warm your home and give your thermostat a break! Cost: Nothing! Savings potential: About \$5 per window depending on location and time of year.
- Check for drafts coming from doors, windows, walls, ceilings and floors, then caulk and weather-strip them as necessary. Cost: \$5 or less. Savings potential: About \$2 per draft.
- Lower the thermostat setting on your water heater. Cost: Nothing! Savings potential: About \$24 per year, if the setting is reduced by 10 degrees Fahrenheit, and operates at the lowest allowable temperature for normal use.
- Close heating vents and cover exterior windows in rooms not often used. Cost: Nothing!



Source: www.energy.com

If There Is a Weather Emergency....Make Sure You Are Prepared

CANNED FOOD

CLOTHING/BEDDING

BOTTLED WATER:
One gallon per day per person

MONEY/TRAVELER'S
CHECKS

SANITATION:
Toilet paper, towelettes, soap, liquid detergent, feminine supplies, plastic garbage bags & ties, plastic bucket & tight lid, disinfectant spray, household chlorine bleach

FOR BABIES:
Formula, diapers, bottles & nipples, powdered milk, medications, blankets

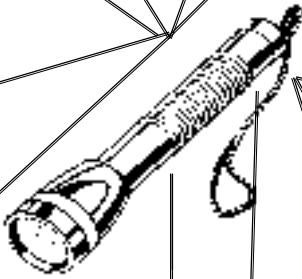
FOR ADULTS:
Insulin, prescription medicine, denture equipment, contact lens & supplies, extra eye glasses

DOCUMENTS:
Most recent bank & credit card records & receipts, wills, insurance policies, stocks & bonds, social security cards, birth & marriage certificates, passports

FIRST AID KIT:
Bandages, soap, sunscreen, gauze pads, scissors, tweezers, needle, towelettes, thermometer, petroleum jelly

FOR PETS:
Dry pet food, one gallon of water for each day, plastic food dishes, blankets, towels, trash bags, ID, photo, airline approved traveling carrier, medications, vaccination records & registrations, leash

TOOLS:
Batteries, radio, flashlights, non-electric can opener, shut-off wrench, paper plates/cups, paper towels, matches, whistle, paper & pen



HOLD THIS DATE: MAY 12

What: Energy Summit

"Energy and Telecommunications Opportunities for Local Governments"

When: Friday, May 12 2000

8:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

**Where: The Sheraton at Woodbridge Place,
515 Route 1 South
Iselin, NJ**

This special program will include representatives from the Board of Public Utilities, state legislators, municipal officials and displays and exhibits from energy suppliers and consultants.

Sponsored by The NJ League of Municipalities in cooperation with the Division of the Ratepayer Advocate

✓ **COMPLIMENTARY PUBLICATIONS OF THE RATEPAYER ADVOCATE:**

- **Telecommunications Position Papers** (January 2000)
A primer on telecommunications technology in the new millennium and the emerging competitive landscape.
- **Consumer Assistance Handbook** (November 1999)
An informative guide for natural gas, water, electric, telephone and cable television customers.
- **Universal Service: Ensuring Lifeline Services** (June 1999)
This publication includes information about providing assistance to all ratepayers, including retired and disabled persons and others on limited incomes.
- **Electric Deregulation: What's the next step for municipalities?** (May 1999)
Information on the provisions of the Electric Discount and Energy Competition Act, including an overview of municipal aggregation.

NEWSLETTERS: (Available in English and Spanish)

- Customer Choice Q&A
- Tips for Choosing an Electric Generation Supplier
- A Consumer Update on Customer Choice for Residential Natural Gas Users
- A Consumer Update on Area Code Relief
- A Consumer Update on Deregulation of Cable Television Rates
- Municipal Aggregation

Publications are also available on our website at <http://www.njin.net/rpa> in English and Spanish

● **PUBLICATIONS FOR SALE:**

Manual for Government Aggregators (September 1999)

\$25 for non-profits/\$50 for profit agencies

A Guide to Sections 42-45 of the "Electric Discount and Energy Competitions Act"

This manual includes a step-by-step guide for New Jersey Municipalities considering aggregating the energy needs of residential and commercial constituents.

● **REQUEST A SPEAKER FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION'S COMMUNITY OUTREACH:**

The Division of the Ratepayer Advocate is available to speak to your group on a variety of utility topics. We can tailor topics to fit your organization's needs.

Name _____

Organization _____

Topic of Interest _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Phone number _____

***Please fax your request to (973) 624-1047 or mail to:
N.J. Division of the Ratepayer Advocate
P.O. Box 46005
Newark, N.J. 07101***

