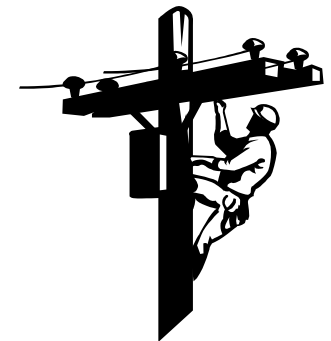




# Social Policies and Consumer Issues



August 3, 2009

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Management Services Division

# Low Income Consumers Protection

Low –income customers, military personnel, seniors may qualify for shut-off protection through various programs:

- Winter Protection Plan.
- Earn Income Credit.
- Home Heating Credit.
- State Emergency Relief Program.
- Protection for Customers on Active Military Duty.
- Other Assistance Options.

# The Winter Protection Plan (WPP)

The winter protection plan protects seniors and low-income customers of Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) regulated natural gas, and electric companies, rural electric cooperatives, and alternative electric suppliers from electric or natural gas service shut-off and high utility payments between November 1 and March 31.

Persons qualify for the plan if they meet any of the following criteria:

- Age 65 or older (some companies may use age 62).
- Receive Michigan Department of Human Services Cash Assistance.
- Receive Food Stamps or Medicaid.

FOR MORE INFO...

<http://www.michigan.gov/mpsc>

Persons qualify for the plan if they meet any of the following criteria:

- Have a household income at or below 150% of federal poverty level.
- Apply through natural gas or electric utility company.

FOR MORE INFO...

<http://www.michigan.gov/mpsc>

# Earned Income Credits

The Earned Income Credit (EIC) is a special tax benefit for people who work full or part time. Those who qualify will owe less in taxes and may get a refund. Even a person who does not generally owe income tax may get a credit, but must file a tax return to do so.

# Earned Income Credits

The Earned Income Credit may reduce the amount of tax owed and may offset some living expenses by helping pay utility bills.

# Types of Earned Income Credits

There are two types of Earned Income Credits offered:

- Michigan Earned Income Tax Credit (MEITC).
- Federal Earned Income Credit (EITC).

# Michigan Earned Income Tax Credit (MEITC)

A tax payer may claim a Michigan earned income tax credit equal to 10 percent of the Federal Earned Income Tax Credit for which the taxpayer is eligible. The average credit amount is approximately \$190 and the maximum credit amount is \$482.

# Federal Earned Income Credit (EITC)

A tax payer may claim a Federal Earned Income Credit. Apply for an Earned Income Credit with the U.S. Department of Treasury, Internal Revenue Service (IRS).

# Who is eligible for the Federal Earned Income Credit (EITC)?

To be eligible for a full or partial credit, a taxpayer must meet one of the following criteria:

- Anyone who worked in 2008, had an income of less than \$38,646 (\$41,646 if married-filing jointly), and had more than one qualifying child living in the home
- Anyone who worked in 2008, had an income of less than \$33,995 (\$36,995 if married-filing jointly), and had one qualifying child living in the home

# Who is eligible for the Federal Earned Income Credit (EITC)?

Anyone who worked in 2008, had an income of less than \$12,880, (\$15,880 if married and filing jointly), and did not have a qualifying child living in the home.

**FOR MORE INFO...**

<http://www.michigan.gov/eitc>.

# What are the benefits for Federal Earned Income Credit (EITC)?

- The amount of a credit depends on the number of children in a family and the family's income. For example, the basic credit for a family ranges from \$2,917 to \$4,824 depending on the number of qualifying children.
- The credit for anyone who worked but did not have a qualifying child could be as much as \$438.

# Home Heating Credit (HHC)

Qualified persons may receive a credit to help pay winter heating bills. Apply for a Home Heating Credit if you have a low income, are receiving public assistance, or are receiving unemployment compensation. Eligible customers must meet guidelines based on household income, exemptions, and heating costs.

# Who can apply for Home Heating Credit (HHC)?

Home Heating Credit Eligible customers must meet the following guidelines:

- Your homestead is in Michigan
- You own or rent the home (including a rented apartment or mobile home on a lot in a mobile home park) where you live

# Who can apply for Home Heating Credit (HHC)?



Your income is within the limits listed in the chart or you qualify based on alternative guidelines including household income, exemptions, and heating costs.

# The 2008 Eligible Chart for Home Heating Credit (HHC)

Customers who qualify for the Home Heating Credit (HHC) are also eligible for the Winter Protection Plan.

Number of Exemptions*	Maximum Income
1	\$11,443
2	\$15,415
3	\$19,386
4	\$23,329
5	\$27,301
6	\$31,243

\*Note: Add \$3,971 for each additional exemption. Special exemptions are available if you are deaf, blind, a person with a disability, or age 65 or older.

-2008 Home Heating Credit

# State Emergency Relief Program

This program may help low-income households pay part of their heating or electric bills and may help keep their utilities in service or have service restored. The program is available year round.

**FOR MORE INFO...**

Call the US or local Department of Human Services office.

# Protection for Customers on Active Military Duty

Utility customers or their spouses called to full-time active military duty by President or the Governor during a time of declared national or state emergency or war may apply for shut-off protection for electric or natural gas service for up to 90 days. These customers may reapply for extensions. The utility company may request verification of active duty status. Customers will still be responsible for all services used during the time of protection.

# Protection for Customers on Active Military Duty Guidelines:

- Is on full-time active duty.
- Is deployed overseas in response to a declared war or undeclared hostilities or is deployed within the United States in response to a declared national or state emergency with a resulting reduction in household income.

# Protection for Customers on Active Military Duty Guidelines:

- Notifies the utility of his or her eligibility.
- Provides verification of eligibility, if requested by the utility.

# Protection for Customers on Active Military Duty

Upon customer request, the protections include:

- Shutoff protection to an eligible military family for a period of 90 days.
- Shutoff protection for at least one additional 90 day period as long as the family continues to meet all of the conditions for an eligible military family.

# Protection for Customers on Active Military Duty

- A payment schedule at the close of the last 90 days that allows the customer to pay past due bills monthly installments over a 12-month period.

# Other Assistance Options

- The Heat and Warmth Fund (THAW) provides payment assistance to low-income residents in 73 Michigan counties including the Upper Peninsula.
- Local Salvation Army-provide emergency assistance.
- Community Action Agency may help with emergency assistance, caulking and insulation, if specific low-income guidelines are met.

# Other Assistance Options

- There are three types of outage conditions that may qualify for a credit. In all cases, customers need to notify their electric utility of the outage.
  - Catastrophic condition outages
  - Normal condition outages
  - Frequent /Repetitive outages

# Catastrophic Condition Outages

A customer is eligible for a credit under catastrophic conditions if the utility fails to restore service within 120 hours after an outage resulting from catastrophic conditions. A catastrophic condition is defined as an event that results in an official state of emergency or an event resulting in an interruption for 10% or more of a utility's customers.

# Normal Condition Outages

A customer is eligible for a credit under normal conditions if the utility fails to restore service within 16 hours after an outage resulting from conditions other than catastrophic conditions.

# Repetitive Interruptions Outages

A customer is eligible for a credit for repetitive interruptions if experiencing more than 7 interruptions in a 12 month period. For each outage, the date and time of the outage should be noted in a log or written record. Additional notes should include: when the service was restored, the date and time the company was notified of the outage, and how the company was notified.

# Low-Income Energy Assistance Grants (LIEAG)

The Michigan Public Service Commission invites proposals to provide both energy assistance to low-income customers confronted with energy shut-off, as well as presentation programs to reduce the number of customers experiencing energy shut off. Only nonprofit and public organizations are eligible to submit proposals. One or more grants will be awarded. Grants will be funded by the low-income and energy efficiency fund. The total amount available for low-income energy assistance grants is \$55 million.

# Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible to receive a LIEAG, the applicant must meet the following eligibility requirements:

The applicant must be a nonprofit or public organization services to low-income residents in Michigan. A public organization is considered to be a governmental agency.

# Eligibility Requirements

- The funds requested must supplement, not substitute for existing funding
- The applicant must submit one signed original proposal and 10 copies of same by the time and date specified in the cover letter.

# Eligibility Requirements

The proposal must be prepared using the form specified in Part V, Information requirements from Applicants.

# Preference in awarding the grants will be given to organizations:

- With a proven record in distributing energy assistance to low-income residents.
- With an existing administrative structure to handle additional distribution activities.

# Preference in awarding the grants will be given to organizations:

- Able to coordinate the provisions of energy assistance with other service providers.
- Serving multiple counties or population of at least 500,000 people.
- With low administrative and over head costs.

# Low-Income and Energy Efficiency Fund (LIEEF)

- The Customer Choice and Electricity Reliability Act of 2000, authorized the creation of a Low-Income and Energy Efficiency Fund, administered by the Michigan Public Service Commission via grants to qualifying organizations.
- The purpose of the fund is to provide shut-off and other protective for low-income customers and to promote energy efficiency by all customer classes.

# Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible to receive a LIEEG, the applicant must meet the following eligibility requirements:

- The applicant must be a nonprofit, public, private organization offering service to low-income residents in Michigan. A public organization is considered to be a governmental agency.

# Eligibility Requirements

- The funds requested must supplement, not substitute for existing funding.
- The applicant must submit one signed original proposal and 10 copies of same by the time and date specified in the cover letter.

# Eligibility Requirements

The proposal must be prepared using the form specified in Part V, Information requirements from Applicants.

# Preference in awarding the grants will be given to organizations:

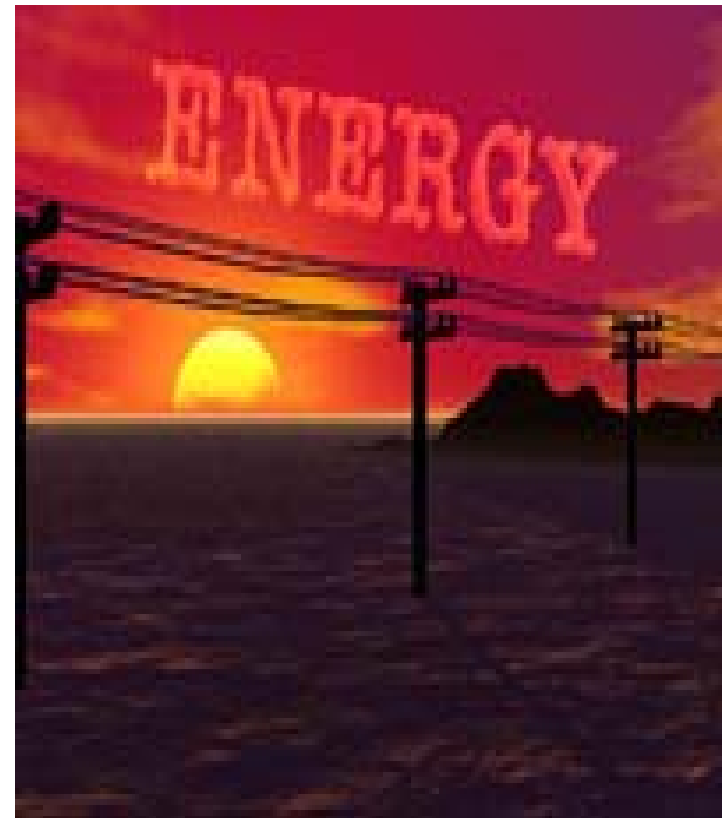
- With a proven record in conducting energy efficiency programs for low-income households
- With an existing administrative structure to handle additional distribution activities.

# Preference in awarding the grants will be given to organizations:

- Most capable of offering services statewide.
- With a high ratio of direct deliverables compared to administrative costs.
- That are Michigan-based.

# Michigan Energy Efficiency Grant (MIEEG)

- The nation's increasing demand for energy necessitates a reliance on foreign oil and other non-renewable energy resources.
- This reliance has the potential to jeopardize our physical and economic security as well as to damage our environment.



# Michigan Energy Efficiency Grant (MIEEG)

The Michigan Public Service Commission invites proposals from organizations for Michigan Energy Efficiency Grants (MIEEG). There are three separate components to this grant proposal:

- Develop or improve the quality or application of energy efficient technologies.
- Promote and increase the use of Energy Star Compact Fluorescent Lamps (CFL's).
- Develop Green Community Programs.

# Michigan Energy Efficiency Grant (MIEEG)

The purpose of this grant is to obtain proposals to develop or improve the quality or application of energy efficient technologies, promote and increase the use of Energy Star Community programs. Michigan energy efficiency grants will be available to non-profit, public, and private organizations. Preference will be given to projects that have a significant impact on both the energy efficiency and economy of Michigan. This grant is offered as part of the Low-income and energy Efficiency Fund (LIEEF) administered by the Michigan Public Service Commission.

# Michigan Energy Efficiency Grant (MIEEG)

The intent of the grant (s) awarded from the fund is to benefit Michigan residents, businesses, educational institutions, and /or government agencies through the development and marketing of advanced energy efficient technologies. This RFP grant offers three separate components:

# Energy Efficient Technology Program

Develop or improve energy efficient technologies. Including the use of alternative fuels; improve energy consumption efficiency; advance development of emerging technologies; expand renewable energy technologies; and improve energy production and distribution. Increase the availability, distribution, and market share of energy efficient technologies. Demonstrate the application of energy efficient technologies. The total amount available for these grants are \$12 million.

# CFL Program

Promote and increase the use of Energy Star qualified Compact Fluorescent Lamps (CFL's). The total amount available for this grants is \$2 million.

# Green Community Program

Promote events, educational initiatives, and/or implementation of energy efficient products designed to assist in the development of Green Community programs. This can be accomplished through the use of innovative tools that encourage community-based renewable energy and energy efficiency programs that provide environmental conservation and help build community capacity and knowledge, in order to create more livable communities and a stronger economy. Individual grants of up to \$50,000 will be distributed, with a total of \$1 million in grants being awarded.

# Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible to receive a MIEEG, the applicant must meet the following eligibility requirements:

The applicant must be a nonprofit, public, private organization. A public organization is considered to be a governmental agency or an educational institution.

# Eligibility Requirements

- The funds requested must supplement, not substitute for existing funding
- The applicant must submit one signed original proposal and 15 copies of same by the time and date specified in the cover letter.

# Eligibility Requirements

The proposal must be prepared using the form specified in Part V, Information requirements from Applicants.

# Preference in awarding the grants will be given to organizations:

- That have a positive impact on energy efficiency and the economy of Michigan.
- With an existing administrative structure to handle additional distribution activities.

# Preference in awarding the grants will be given to organizations:

- With a high ratio of direct deliverable compared to administrative costs
- That are Michigan based

# Your Rights as a Utility Customer in Michigan

- General Rights
- You have 21 days to pay your bill
- You are entitled to prompt, courteous service
- You will be given an opportunity to pay your bill in installments if you have a financial emergency

# Your Rights as a Utility Customer in Michigan

- The utility will continue your service if you have a proven medical emergency.
- The utility will follow strict procedures before your service is shut off
- The utility may add a 2 percent charge for a late payment unless you are participating in the Winter Protection plan.

# Your Rights as a Utility Customer in Michigan-Shutoff Rules

Your utility service may be shut off if you:

- Do not keep up with your settlement agreement;
- Tamper with service or utility equipment;
- Refuse to let the service person read your meter or inspect or repair utility equipment;
- Use a false name to get service.

# Your Rights as a Utility Customer in Michigan-Shutoff Rules

- The utility company must send you written notice ten days before shutting off your service.
- Your utility service shall not be shut off if you:
  - Do not pay for merchandise or appliances purchased from the utility;

# Your Rights as a Utility Customer in Michigan-Shutoff Rules

Rent your residence and your utilities are included in your rent, but your landlord fails to pay the bill. In this situation you, as renter, can prevent the shutoff if you:

- Agree to put the service in your name. If you do, the utility company cannot charge you any of the past bill; or
- Participate in the Winter Protection Plan. Call the PSC to apply, your income level must be within their acceptable guidelines to qualify.

# Your Rights as a Utility Customer in Michigan-Shutoff Rules

- If you have complaints about your utility company or your bill, you should contact the utility company.
- If you have specific questions regarding your rights as a utility customer, or problems settling complaints with your utility company, contact the Public Service Commission at 1-800-292-9555. (TDD 1-800-443-8926).

# Consumer Rights and Responsibilities

## Billing

Billing Practices Applicable to Non Residential Electric and Gas Customers:

- Part 1. General Provisions.
- Part 2. Application for Service.
- Part 3. General Customer Deposit Conditions.
- Part 4. Meter Reading, Estimated Bills, Billing Adjustments, Voluntary Termination, and Meter Relocation.

# Consumer Rights and Responsibilities

## Billing

Billing Practices Applicable for Electric and Gas Residential Service Customers:

- Part 1. General Provisions.
- Part 2. Application for Service.
- Part 3. Deposit and Guarantee Terms and Conditions.
- Part 4. Meter Reading Procedures, Meter Accuracy, Meter Errors and Relocation.
- Part 5. Billing and Payment Standards.

# Consumer Rights and Responsibilities

## Billing

- Part 6. Voluntary Termination of Service.
- Part 7. Utility Procedures.
- Part 8. Procedures for Shutoff and Restoration of Service.
- Part 9. Energy Assistance and Shutoff Protection Programs.
- Part 10. Disputed Claim, Hearing and Settlement Agreement.
- Part 11. Commission Appeal Procedures.

# Consumer Rights and Responsibilities

## Billing

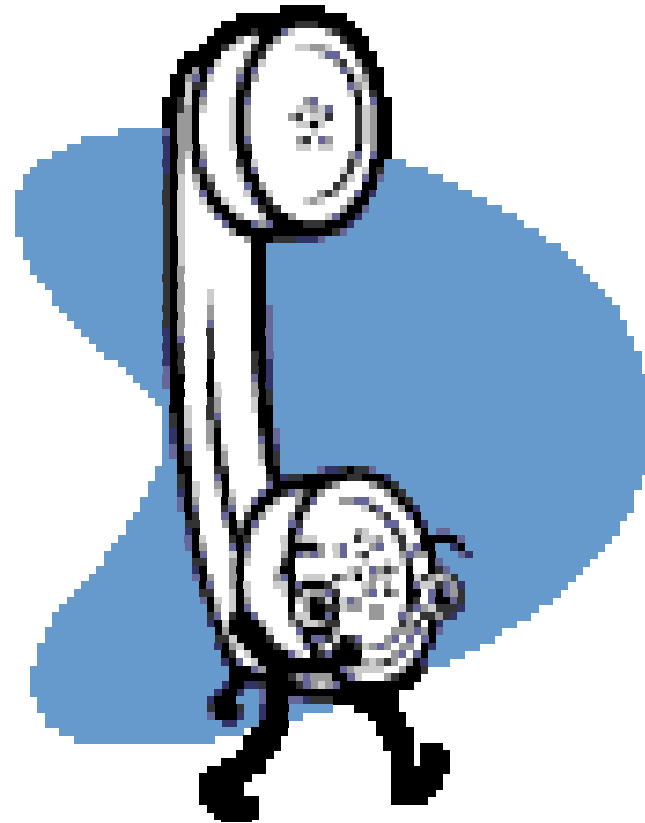
- Part V. Billing and Payments.
- Part VI. Customer Relations and Utility Procedures.
- Part VII. Shutoffs and Restoration.
- Part VIII. Disputed Claims, Hearings and Settlement Agreements.

# Consumer Safety Call Before You Dig

Established in November, 1970, Miss Dig System, Inc. as pilot program in Oakland County by five major Michigan utility companies (Consumers Energy, Detroit Edison, Verizon, AT & T, and Michigan Consolidated Gas) in an effort to reduce damages to their underground facilities, prevent injuries, and save lives. The participating utilities included underground telephone and telegraph, gas, electric, water, sewer, storm lines, and drains.

# MISS DIG System, Inc. Other Notable Firsts

- The MISS DIG System was the first 24-hour operated call center in the U.S.
- The MISS DIG System was the first computerized one-call center in the U.S.
- The MISS DIG System was the first statewide one-call center in the U.S.



# MISS DIG System, Inc. Other Notable Firsts

- The MISS DIG System was the first center to offer an overhead electric program in the U.S.
- The MISS DIG System has the largest total ticket-taking volume of any one-call center in the U.S. with over 16 million total requests since 1970.
- The MISS DIG System, Inc. is a member of One Call Systems International (OCSI).
- The MISS DIG System's busiest months are April, May and October. The average number of tickets taken per day in the summer is over 4, 200.

# Review

## Social Policies and Consumer Issues

# Citations

- **Additional information may be found at the Michigan Public Service Commission (Consumer Issues) website (<http://www.michigan.gov/mpsc/0,1607,7-159-16368---,00.html>).**
- **Additional information may be found at the Miss Dig Systems, Inc. website ([www.missdig.org](http://www.missdig.org)).**