



Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

Your Residential Utility Consumer Advocate

CONSUMERS' FACT SHEET

Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

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ENERGY CHOICES AVAILABLE TO CONSUMERS: ENERGY CHOICE 101

Ohio consumers should be aware of some of the risks and important steps to take before considering signing up with an energy marketer. The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) is the residential utility consumer advocate and has resources to help consumers make informed decisions about their utilities.

Consumers are not able to choose the company that delivers their utilities, but can choose who supplies their electric or natural gas, that includes getting their energy directly from their utilities through the competitively-priced standard offer. Consumers of investor-owned utilities that are current with their utility bills are eligible for energy choice programs. Electric choice is offered to consumers of AEP Ohio, Dayton Power and Light Company, Duke Energy Ohio, and FirstEnergy Utilities.

Natural gas choice is offered to consumers of Columbia Gas of Ohio, Dominion East Ohio, Duke Energy Ohio, and Vectren Energy Delivery of Ohio. Energy choice is not available to consumers of municipal power systems, members of co-ops or participants in the Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP Plus). Consumers have three options in energy choice:

1. Stay with the utility

Consumers always have the option to stay with their utility company. Their utility will continue to supply the consumers service at the Standard Choice Offer (natural gas) or Standard Service Offer (electric) rates. **At this time, the utility's standard offer is the safest and the most economical choice, because participation in energy choice does not guarantee savings.** Consumers can confirm if they are getting the standard offer by contacting their utility or reviewing their bill. And consumers can contact their utility to switch from a marketer offer to the standard offer.

2. Governmental aggregation

In some parts of Ohio, government aggregation is another option to get a competitive price for electricity. Under government aggregation, communities can authorize the local government, frequently through an election, to supply electricity to their residents. Governments use the buying power of many customers to negotiate competitive prices.

There are two methods of enrollment. "Opt-out" aggregation automatically

SHOPPING FOR A SUPPLIER CAN BE RISKY

Often the utility's rate is more economical in the long run. If you choose to shop, you should ask the following questions:

- ▶ Is there a fee to sign up?
- ▶ Is there a fee to switch if I decide to go back to my utility company or decide to switch to another energy supplier?
- ▶ How long is the agreement?
- ▶ How much will I pay (the rate) for energy?
- ▶ Is there a fee to cancel my agreement?
- ▶ At the end of my agreement, will it automatically renew?
- ▶ If my agreement automatically renews, will the new rate be higher?
- ▶ If I have a billing problem, who should I contact?
- ▶ What are the terms and conditions of the agreement? (Always obtain, and keep, a copy of the agreement.)
- ▶ What happens if I decide to move before the agreement expires?
- ▶ When will my service from the energy supplier begin?
- ▶ When will the supplier's charges for energy appear on my bill?

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The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC), the residential utility consumer advocate, represents the interests of 4.5 million households in proceedings before state and federal regulators and in the courts.

The state agency also educates consumers about electric, natural gas, telephone and water issues.

For more information, please visit the OCC website at www.occ.ohio.gov.



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includes each consumer in the aggregation unless the individual decides not to participate. “Opt-in” aggregation requires each consumer to agree to participate in the program before being included in the aggregation. Consumers have 14 to 21 days to respond to aggregation offers.

Before enrolling, consumers should compare the aggregation rate with the Standard Choice Offer (natural gas) and the Standard Service Offer (electric). Aggregators may possess greater bargaining power than individual consumers and negotiate for group benefits or better rates.

The aggregator will notify the consumer's utility if the consumer chooses to participate, and the utility will send the consumer a confirmation letter in the mail. Seven days after the confirmation notice, enrollment will take place.

Consumers should open any mail from aggregation groups, local governments and marketers to learn about aggregation opportunities. Visit the OCC's aggregation web page for more information, www.occ.ohio.gov/aggregation.

3. Third party supplier

As part of energy choice, consumers can purchase natural gas or electricity from

a certified energy marketer. Consumers that have chosen a marketer will pay the marketer for the cost of the energy and pay their utility company for the transmission, distribution, and delivery.

Before enrolling in a marketer's contract, consumers should compare the rate offered by the marketer with the “Standard Choice Offer” on their natural gas bill and the “Price to Compare” on their electric bill. If consumers are on a utility's budget billing plan, they should contact the marketer for information about their options.

If a consumer chooses to accept a marketer's contract, the marketer will notify the consumer's utility. The marketer will also typically send information to consumers about its company and contact information. The utility will send the consumer a confirmation notice and consumers have seven days to cancel the marketer's contract. Seven days after the confirmation notice, enrollment will take place. After enrollment, most consumers will see the marketer's charges separately identified on their monthly utility bill. It may take up to two to three billing cycles for a third party supplier to appear or be removed from a customer's bill. Consumers should note that some contracts may come with an Early Termination Fee (ETF) if the customer decides to switch before the contract ends.