



**Taking Time by Rebecca Escott**

**You Have To Sign Up To Shop**

Citizens have to register before they can vote. A similar thing is true when it comes to shopping for electricity. Customers have to sign up before you can shop. Now you may have thought your opportunity passed. It hasn't.

Although original enrollment deadlines were slated for the beginning of November, the companies did not get the enthusiastic response that they had expected. This means, consumers who were busy with family obligations still have a chance to respond and save money on their utility bills next year. This is particularly important if you have an all-electric home!

For commercial accounts this is not the case. They needed to make their selections by the stated deadlines. As consumer specialists have monitored this first round of "shopping," they recognize that the utility companies are not really paying much attention to the individual consumer. Instead they are focusing on locking in the major corporate accounts. Perhaps that's

the reason many of you haven't been flooded at the mailbox with special deals.

Even though the companies are not pressuring you to enroll, it is still important that you take a few minutes this holiday season to consider the money you can save. When some of you open your bill in January and have to pay for all those elaborate holiday light displays, you may be glad you signed up for a lower rate!

So if you haven't chosen an electricity generating company, here's what you need to do:

1. Call your local electric company and say you want to enroll in the program.

2. Ask what rate they will charge you per kilowatt-hour (kwh) including transmission charges.

3. Ask them to supply you with a list of companies who are interested in generating your electricity. The number of suppliers will vary from region to region. Unfortunately, in some rural areas there may be only one company interested in your business.

4. Contact any of the companies

on the list that you are interested in doing business with.

5. Ask the following questions:

• How much will I pay per kwh for electricity?

• Does this quoted price include transmission? If no, how much will that cost?

• Are there any monthly charges or fees? There are some companies that have advertised fees much lower than your local utility but they don't calculate into that figure a monthly membership fee or a minimum service charge, etc.

• Will I get one bill each month or two? The customer may not have control over this, but at least you will know what to expect. If it is important to you to receive only one bill, make sure to find a company that can do this.

• What length of contract must I sign? Dennis Buffington, Penn State agricultural engineering faculty member, recommends that people not sign contracts longer than one year. Because the "dust hasn't settled" on this program yet, it's best not to get locked in to one agreement for an extended period of time. The company may not require a contract.

• What happens if I break the contract? What fees will I incur?

6. When you find the best deal, take it! Remember, the "best" deal may not be the least expensive. Remember to consider reliability of the company and whether the company supports your ecological values. For now, consumer enrollment is on-going. You can expect to achieve roughly 5-10 percent reduction in your monthly bill once you've chosen a supplier. Consumers can expect it to take 30-60 days to transfer to the new

system once they have selected a company.

Buffington reminds homeowners that if saving money is your biggest interest, you can save as much on your utility bill or more by installing compact fluorescent lights for lights that you have on at least four hours a day. He also recommends that any electric motors you use be high efficiency

ones. And, if you have any old appliances (refrigerators, freezers, air conditioners), consider replacing them. The newer models are much more energy efficient and will pay for themselves through utility savings in a few short years.

So while you "shop 'til you drop" for holiday presents, add one more task to the list: shop for an electricity supplier.

**Make Family Times Happy Times**

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — It is normal for kids to get caught up in the excitement of the holiday season. At this time of year, there are often extra events for the family members to attend and busy schedules at home. Sometimes it is hard for parents to be patient and calm. Listed below are some hints to help your family enjoy family times.

• Make sure each child gets some one-on-one attention each day. Fifteen or 20 minutes spent with your child can create a happier household for the rest of the day.

• Limit the amount of television viewing time for your family. Watching too many holiday shows and ads can cause kids to become overexcited.

• Everyone needs to get enough sleep. This can make a difference between enjoying holiday times or having grumpy, frazzled family members.

• Make lists of things to get done. Have everyone help. Even young children can help with simple jobs, such as setting the table or putting laundry away.

• Play music while doing

chores around the house together. Let everyone have a turn selecting their favorite.

• Give your children things to do. Active kids need to be kept busy and busy kids behave better. This may take a bit of organizing, but will provide you with calmer moments around the house.

• Plan some new art activities or games for your children for times when you will be busy with other things. Do make sure to be close enough to supervise and help if needed.


• Use humor with your child to change a negative mood. Laughing together can make everyone feel good.

• Take time for yourself. Go for a walk, take a bubble bath, watch a favorite movie, or call a friend. This can help you be more patient with your children

Parents, if you want information about raising your kids or to talk about a problem, call Penn State Cooperative Extension's Better Kid Care *You're Not Alone* help line. The toll-free number is 1-800-859-8340. Trained professionals can provide information.

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