

December 19, 2023

Natural gas prices are decreasing

The Ontario Energy Board (OEB) has approved new natural gas prices for EPCOR Natural Gas Limited Partnership's (EPCOR) customers in its Aylmer and South Bruce service areas to take effect January 1, 2024.

REASONS FOR CHANGES TO NATURAL GAS BILLS

Quarterly Rate Adjustment Mechanism (QRAM)

Several factors contribute to the change in natural gas prices approved for EPCOR's QRAM for the January 1 to March 31 period. The market price of natural gas is decreasing due to warmer than normal weather and North American natural gas storage inventory levels that are higher than normal.¹

Total Annual Bill Impact

As noted in Table 1, beginning January 1, 2024, the total annual bill impact* for residential customers using a typical amount of natural gas in each service area will be:

Table 1

Service Area and Typical Annual Usage for a Residential Customer	EPCOR Aylmer 1,780 m ³	EPCOR South Bruce 2,149 m ³
Total Annual Bill – Current	\$1,131.84	\$1,706.64
– Beginning January 1, 2024	\$1,122.83	\$1,692.05
Total Annual Bill Impact	-\$9.00	-\$14.59
Percentage Change	-0.8%	-0.9%

*Bill impacts will vary depending on how much natural gas individual customers use. Natural gas use is generally lowest during the summer months.

Other Rate Changes

Other changes taking effect on January 1, 2024, and included in Table 1 above are rate changes and temporary rate adjustments previously approved by the OEB in:

The QRAM is the process by which the OEB adjusts the prices that natural gas customers pay for the natural gas that they use and to reflect changes in natural gas market prices.

These price changes are approved to take effect on the 1st of the month in January, April, July, and October each year.

The OEB does not allow natural gas distributors to earn a profit on the sale of natural gas, regardless of market fluctuations in price.

Other Rate Changes

The OEB also sets rates that natural gas distributors can charge for the delivery and storage of natural gas.

Any changes to those rates that are approved by the OEB between QRAM decisions also take effect on the first day of the next calendar quarter.

¹ <https://www.eia.gov/outlooks/steo/>

- EPCOR Aylmer’s application for 2024 rates²
 - For Aylmer customers, this results in a bill increase of approximately \$28.
- EPCOR South Bruce’s application for 2024 rates³
 - For South Bruce customers, this results in a bill increase of approximately \$6.

Temporary rate adjustments are credits or costs that have been approved for refund or recovery from customers over a temporary period.

ABOUT THE QRAM

Natural gas is a commodity that is bought and sold on North American energy markets. At any given time, its price fluctuates based on a variety of factors including supply and demand, seasonal changes, levels of stored natural gas, and major weather events. EPCOR updates its forecast of market prices every three months and uses that forecast to seek the OEB’s approval of its proposed changes to natural gas commodity prices. These proposed changes cover:

- **Future costs:** This is based on a forecast of market prices for natural gas over the next 12-month period.
- **Past costs:** This is based on the difference between what the utility previously forecast that their customers would pay and what their customers actually paid. This kind of adjustment is needed because the gas prices charged to customers are based on forecasts, which are never 100% accurate. The adjustment for past costs can increase or lower the rate accordingly. For example, if a utility collected more from customers than it paid for gas in the past, the difference is credited back to customers through a lower rate. Likewise, if not enough was collected by the utility, the rate will be higher.

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PROGRAMS TO SUPPORT NATURAL GAS CUSTOMERS

- **Low-income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP)**
This program provides a grant towards a customer’s electricity and/or natural gas bill if they’re behind on their bill and may face having their service shut off. It is for emergency situations. See [OEB.ca/BillHelp](https://www.oeb.ca/BillHelp)
- **Rules to protect low-income customers**
Electricity utilities, unit sub-meter providers and rate-regulated natural gas utilities follow customer service rules specific to low-income customers. These include waiving security deposits and allowing longer payment times under arrears payment plans. [See OEB.ca/BillHelp](https://www.oeb.ca/BillHelp)

About the OEB

The OEB is the independent regulator of Ontario’s electricity and natural gas sectors. It protects the interests of consumers and supports the collective advancement of the people of Ontario. Its goal is to deliver public value through prudent regulation and independent adjudicative decision-making which contributes to Ontario’s economic, social and environmental development.

² EB-2023-0160

³ EB-2023-0161

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This Backgrounder was prepared by OEB staff to inform Ontario's energy consumers about the OEB's decision and is not for use in legal or regulatory proceedings. It is not part of the OEB's reasons for the decision; those may be found in the Decision and Orders issued today, which are the official OEB documents.

Ce document est aussi disponible en français.