

Beware of misleading marketing

Alternative energy suppliers may contact you through door-to-door solicitations, tele-marketing, direct mailings and at kiosks in public places. Unfortunately, many of these companies use deceptive marketing. You can avoid being misled by doing the following:

- If someone asks to see your utility bill, say no and ask them to leave materials for you to review later on your own time.
- Never give or show your utility account number to anyone unless you fully understand what you are signing up for.
- Be wary of alternative energy suppliers that claim to save you money – their prices are usually higher than traditional utility prices.
- If an alternative energy supplier offers a price that seems lower than your utility, it could be an introductory rate that increases later and don't forget about hidden fees.
- No alternative energy supplier is affiliated with or endorsed by your utility or the state.
- Free gift cards or other incentives may not offset higher prices.



For more information about alternative suppliers, call the Attorney General's Consumer Fraud Bureau:

Chicago
1-800-386-5438

Springfield
1-800-243-0618

Carbondale
1-800-243-0607

Spanish Language Toll-Free Hotline:
1-866-310-8398

Individuals with hearing or speech disabilities can reach us by using the 7-1-1 relay service.

You can also submit a complaint online:
www.IllinoisAttorneyGeneral.gov

If you are having trouble paying your home utility bills, you may be able to secure a payment plan through your utility or receive assistance dollars through the state Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). For more information, contact the Illinois Commerce Commission's toll-free customer service line at:

1-800-521-0795

09/23

This material is available in alternate format upon request.



**ALTERNATIVE
ENERGY SUPPLIERS:
HIGHER PRICES WITH
QUESTIONABLE BENEFITS**

Avoid Deceptive Practices and
Higher Prices by Sticking with
your Public Utility



Between June 2014 and May 2019, customers in Illinois overpaid alternative electricity suppliers by over \$870 million.

Alternative suppliers are for-profit companies that sell the same electricity and natural gas to consumers that your traditional public utility provides, but alternative suppliers usually charge higher prices that can fluctuate without warning.

Marketers may come to your door, call you on the phone, approach you at retail stores, or send you direct mail or electronic mail. Regardless of what salespeople for alternative energy suppliers tell you, keep these things in mind:

- **You are not required to enroll with an alternative energy supplier. If you take no action, your default supplier will be your utility, whose rates are regulated by a state agency or a supplier chosen by your local government through municipal aggregation.**
- Alternative energy suppliers are not part of the utility, or approved by the utility.
- Alternative energy suppliers are not part of a government-approved savings program and they do not have to offer you a good price or save you money.
- Charges from an alternative energy supplier do appear on your utility bill.
- Compared to utilities, alternative energy suppliers can, and usually do, charge higher prices and added fees.

Do not sign up with an alternative energy supplier unless you understand that you will almost certainly be charged higher prices and more fees than you would with your traditional public utility.

If you are enrolled with an alternative energy supplier, you may pay more for your electricity or natural gas than you would pay to your utility for the exact same service. Alternative energy suppliers typically offer low introductory prices that appear to be lower than the utility price but increase substantially after a few months.

Beginning January 1, 2020:

- Marketers who try to sell energy to you must tell you the utility's rate, also referred to as the utility's "price to compare."
- Alternative energy suppliers may not enroll you if you receive financial assistance to pay for your utility bills through the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) or the Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP).
- If you become enrolled with an alternative energy supplier, you cannot be switched from a fixed rate contract to a variable rate contract without your express agreement.
- Salespersons may not try to solicit you or sell to you if they are communicating in a language you do not understand.

- You cannot be charged an early termination fee or penalty for cancelling a contract with an alternative energy supplier.

If you want to cancel, here's how:

- **Check your utility bill.** If you are enrolled with an alternative energy supplier, the name of the supplier will appear under the supply portion of your utility bill, which may be located on the back or a later page of your bill.
- **Find out how much you are paying.** A price, in cents per kilowatt hour, and any additional fees will be listed on the supply portion of your bill.
- **Check the public utility price to compare.** You can find utility prices on your ComEd or Ameren electric bill, and at:
 - * Electricity Prices: <https://plugin.illinois.gov/understanding-the-price-to-compare.html>
 - * Natural Gas Prices: <https://www.icc.illinois.gov/natural-gas-choice/purchased-gas-adjustment-rates>
- **Consider cancelling and switching back to the public utility.** You can cancel service with an alternative energy supplier by contacting the company. *Beginning January 1, 2020, alternative energy suppliers cannot charge you a fee or penalty for cancelling the contract.*
- **If you were enrolled with the alternative energy supplier without your knowledge, call the Attorney General's Office or the Illinois Commerce Commission.**