

Merrimack Valley billing and safety FAQ

To help meet their heating and cooking needs, many families impacted by the ongoing restoration of Columbia Gas service in the Merrimack Valley may elect to use electric appliances in place of their normal gas appliances.

Below are answers to frequently asked questions from National Grid electric customers experiencing the Columbia Gas service interruption. Helpful safety tips are also included below.

What impact could the Columbia Gas service interruption have on National Grid electric bills?

Until Columbia Gas is able to restore gas for these customers, our electric customers impacted by this issue may see increases in their electric bills as they begin using electric appliances in place of gas appliances. This is because these needs would have typically been fulfilled by the gas service provided by Columbia Gas, but are now being met with National Grid electric supply.

What are some examples that might cause customers to use more electricity?

- To fulfill cooking needs, customers may choose to use hot plates, microwaves, slow cookers and other small cooking appliances.
- For heating and hot water, customers may choose electric space heaters and hot water heaters.
- In place of gas dryers, some may choose to use portable electric units.

How can customers conserve energy and decrease electric usage?

National Grid offers many [energy saving tips and programs](#) to help customers decrease electric usage.

How can customers manage energy costs?

We're here with you in good circumstances and bad, including when you're having trouble paying your bill. We offer a number of [assistance programs and deferred payment options](#) if you need them. Eligible customers can also sign up for the [Budget Plan](#) which spreads costs evenly over 12 months to remove peaks and valleys from your bill.

Does National Grid offer any income-eligible assistance?

Everyone needs a little help sometimes. We have [several programs](#) to help lower-income families and customers needing special assistance to meet their energy needs.

Some customers are using electric appliances in their homes. Does National Grid recommend safety tips for this equipment?

- If an appliance cord becomes frayed or damaged, stop using it. Do not use appliances with patched cords.
- Don't operate electrical appliances in or near water.
- Never touch an electric appliance while standing on a wet floor or if your hands are wet.
- Immediately turn off and disconnect an appliance that sparks or stalls.
- Always disconnect appliances before cleaning, servicing or repairing them.
- Avoid accidental starts by making sure the switch is off before plugging in the cord.

Some customers are now using electric space heaters to heat their homes. Does National Grid recommend any safety tips for using electric space heaters?

- Plug space heaters directly into wall outlets.
- Do not use extension cords or power strips.
- Keep space heaters three feet away from anything that can catch fire (bedding, furniture, newspapers).
- Teach children to stay three giant steps away from the heater.
- Do not put anything on the heater; do not put clothes on the heater to dry.
- Turn space heaters off when you leave the house or go to bed. Don't leave it running unattended.
- Space heaters are designed for temporary use only, not to replace central heating.
- If the device trips the breaker or blows a fuse, stop using it right away. Call an electrician or ask the landlord to do so.
- Read and follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- The use of portable kerosene heaters is illegal in Massachusetts.

Is there any safety information National Grid recommends for fire and carbon monoxide safety?

- Working smoke alarms are your first line of defense in a fire; they can give you extra time to escape a fire.
- Make sure that you have working smoke and carbon monoxide alarms on every level of your home and outside bedrooms.
- Discuss your fire escape plan with the whole family. Home escape plans should have two ways out of every room and a family meeting place outside.