



Home	Bill Information	California Law	Publications	Other Resources	My Subscriptions	My Favorites
------	------------------	----------------	--------------	-----------------	------------------	--------------

SB-711 Electrical corporations and gas corporations: rates and charges. (2017-2018)

SHARE THIS:  

Date Published: 10/04/2017 02:00 PM

Senate Bill No. 711

CHAPTER 467

An act to amend Section 739 of, and to add Section 739.11 to, the Public Utilities Code, relating to energy.

[Approved by Governor October 03, 2017. Filed with Secretary of State October 03, 2017.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB 711, Hill. Electrical corporations and gas corporations: rates and charges.

(1) Under existing law, the Public Utilities Commission has regulatory authority over public utilities, including electrical corporations and gas corporations. Existing law authorizes the commission to fix the rates and charges for every public utility and requires that those rates and charges be just and reasonable. Existing law requires the commission to designate a baseline quantity of electricity and gas necessary for a significant portion of the reasonable energy needs of the average residential customer and to establish a higher energy allowance above the baseline for residential customers dependent on life-support equipment. For these purposes, "baseline quantity" is defined as a quantity of electricity or gas allocated by the commission for residential customers based on from 50% to 60% of average residential consumption of these commodities, except that, for residential gas customers and for all-electric residential customers, the baseline quantity is required to be established at from 60% to 70% of average residential consumption during the winter heating season.

This bill would require the commission to make efforts to minimize bill volatility for residential customers, explicitly authorizing the commission to do this by modifying the length of baseline seasons or defining additional baseline seasons.

Existing law requires the commission to ensure that errors in estimates of demand elasticity or sales do not result in material overcollection or undercollection of rates and charges by an electrical corporation.

For each gas corporation and electrical corporation that, for some portion of residential customers, employs every-other-month meter reading and estimates bills for months when the customer's meter is not read, the bill would require the commission to direct the gas corporation or electrical corporation to include in its tariffs the methodology it employs to estimate bills for those months during which the meter is not read.

Under existing law, a violation of the Public Utilities Act or any order, decision, rule, direction, demand, or requirement of the commission is a crime.

Because the provisions of this bill would be a part of the act and because a violation of an order or decision of the commission implementing its requirements would be a crime, the bill would impose a state-mandated local program by creating a new crime.

(2) This bill would incorporate additional changes to Section 739 of the Public Utilities Code proposed by AB 1292 to be operative only if this bill and AB 1292 are enacted and this bill is enacted last.

(3) The California Constitution requires the state to reimburse local agencies and school districts for certain costs mandated by the state. Statutory provisions establish procedures for making that reimbursement.

This bill would provide that no reimbursement is required by this act for a specified reason.

Vote: majority Appropriation: no Fiscal Committee: yes Local Program: yes

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1. Section 739 of the Public Utilities Code is amended to read:

739. (a) As used in this section:

(1) "Baseline quantity" means a quantity of electricity or gas allocated by the commission for residential customers based on from 50 to 60 percent of average residential consumption of these commodities, except that, for residential gas customers and for all-electric residential customers, the baseline quantity shall be established at from 60 to 70 percent of average residential consumption during the winter heating season. In establishing the baseline quantities, the commission shall take into account climatic and seasonal variations in consumption and the availability of gas service. The commission shall review and revise baseline quantities as average consumption patterns change in order to maintain these ratios and may do so during the rate case or other ratesetting proceeding of a gas corporation or electrical corporation. The commission shall make efforts to minimize bill volatility for residential customers, including all-electric residential customers. Those efforts may include modifying the length of the baseline seasons or defining additional baseline seasons.

(2) "Residential customer" means those customers receiving electrical or gas service pursuant to a domestic rate schedule and excludes industrial, commercial, and every other category of customer.

(b) The commission shall designate a baseline quantity of gas and electricity which is necessary to supply a significant portion of the reasonable energy needs of the average residential customer. In estimating those quantities, the commission shall take into account differentials in energy needs between customers whose residential energy needs are currently supplied by electricity alone or by both electricity and gas. The commission shall develop a separate baseline quantity for all-electric residential customers. For these purposes, "all-electric residential customers" are residential customers having electrical service only or whose space heating is provided by electricity, or both. The commission shall also take into account differentials in energy use by climatic zone and season.

(c) (1) The commission shall establish a standard limited allowance which shall be in addition to the baseline quantity of gas and electricity for residential customers dependent on life-support equipment, including, but not limited to, emphysema and pulmonary patients. A residential customer dependent on life-support equipment shall be allocated a higher energy allocation than the average residential customer.

(2) "Life-support equipment" means that equipment which utilizes mechanical or artificial means to sustain, restore, or supplant a vital function, or mechanical equipment which is relied upon for mobility both within and outside of buildings. "Life-support equipment," as used in this subdivision, includes all of the following: all types of respirators, iron lungs, hemodialysis machines, suction machines, electric nerve stimulators, pressure pads and pumps, aerosol tents, electrostatic and ultrasonic nebulizers, compressors, IPPB machines, and motorized wheelchairs.

(3) The limited allowance specified in this subdivision shall also be made available to paraplegic and quadriplegic persons in consideration of the increased heating and cooling needs of those persons.

(4) The limited allowance specified in this subdivision shall also be made available to multiple sclerosis patients in consideration of the increased heating and cooling needs of those persons.

(5) The limited allowance specified in this subdivision shall also be made available to scleroderma patients in consideration of the increased heating needs of those persons.

(6) The limited allowance specified in this subdivision shall also be made available to persons who are being treated for a life-threatening illness or have a compromised immune system, if a licensed physician and surgeon or a person licensed pursuant to the Osteopathic Initiative Act certifies in writing to the utility that the additional heating or cooling allowance, or both, is medically necessary to sustain the life of the person or prevent deterioration of the person's medical condition.

(d) (1) The commission shall require that every electrical and gas corporation file a schedule of rates and charges providing baseline rates. The baseline rates shall apply to the first or lowest block of an increasing block rate structure which shall be the baseline quantity. In establishing these rates, the commission shall avoid excessive rate increases for residential customers, and shall establish an appropriate gradual differential between the rates for the respective blocks of usage.

(2) In establishing residential electric and gas rates, including baseline rates, the commission shall ensure that the rates are sufficient to enable the electrical corporation or gas corporation to recover a just and reasonable amount of revenue from residential customers as a class, while observing the principle that electricity and gas services are necessities, for which a low affordable rate is desirable and while observing the principle that conservation is desirable in order to maintain an affordable bill.

(3) At least until December 31, 2003, the commission shall require that all charges for residential electric customers are volumetric, and shall prohibit any electrical corporation from imposing any charges on residential consumption that are independent of consumption, unless those charges are in place prior to April 12, 2001.

(e) (1) Each electrical corporation and each gas corporation shall, in a timeframe consistent with each electrical and gas corporation's next general rate case, disclose on the billing statement of a residential customer all of the following:

- (A) Cost per kilowatthour or gas therm per tier.
- (B) Allocation of kilowatthour or gas therm per tier.
- (C) Visual representation of usage and cost per tier.
- (D) Usage comparison with prior periods.
- (E) Itemized cost components in the bill to identify state and local taxes.
- (F) Identification of delivery, generation, public purpose, and other charges.
- (G) Contact information for the commission's Consumer Affairs Branch.

(2) An electrical corporation and a gas corporation shall make available online to residential customers both of the following:

- (A) Examples of how conservation measures, including changing thermostat settings and turning off unused lights, could reduce energy usage and costs.
- (B) Examples of how energy-saving devices and weatherization measures could reduce energy usage and costs.

(3) The commission may modify, adjust, or add to the requirements of this subdivision as the individual circumstances of each electrical corporation or gas corporation merits, or for master-meter customers, as individual circumstances merit.

(4) The commission shall, as part of the general rate case of an electrical corporation or gas corporation, assess opportunities to improve the quality of information contained in the utility's periodic billings.

(f) Wholesale electrical or gas purchases, and the rates charged therefor, are exempt from this section.

(g) Nothing contained in this section shall be construed to prohibit experimentation with alternative gas or electrical rate schedules for the purpose of achieving energy conservation.

SEC. 1.5. Section 739 of the Public Utilities Code is amended to read:

739. (a) As used in this section:

(1) "Baseline quantity" means a quantity of electricity or gas allocated by the commission for residential customers based on from 50 to 60 percent of average residential consumption of these commodities, except that, for residential gas customers and for all-electric residential customers, the baseline quantity shall be established at from 60 to 70 percent of average residential consumption during the winter heating season. In establishing the baseline quantities, the commission shall take into account climatic and seasonal variations in consumption and the availability of gas service. The commission shall review and revise baseline quantities as average consumption patterns change in order to maintain these ratios and may do so during the rate case or other ratesetting proceeding of a gas corporation or electrical corporation. The commission shall make efforts to minimize bill volatility for residential customers, including all-electric residential customers. Those efforts may include modifying the length of the baseline seasons or defining additional baseline seasons. When computing the average residential consumption of electricity and the "baseline quantity" for usage of electricity, the commission shall appropriately account for any consumption that is met by residential customer generation located on the customer's side of the meter.

(2) "Residential customer" means those customers receiving electrical or gas service pursuant to a domestic rate schedule and excludes industrial, commercial, and every other category of customer.

(b) The commission shall designate a baseline quantity of gas and electricity which is necessary to supply a significant portion of the reasonable energy needs of the average residential customer. In estimating those quantities, the commission shall take into

account differentials in energy needs between customers whose residential energy needs are currently supplied by electricity alone or by both electricity and gas. The commission shall develop a separate baseline quantity for all-electric residential customers. For these purposes, "all-electric residential customers" are residential customers having electrical service only or whose space heating is provided by electricity, or both. The commission shall also take into account differentials in energy use by climatic zone and season.

(c) (1) The commission shall establish a standard limited allowance which shall be in addition to the baseline quantity of gas and electricity for residential customers dependent on life-support equipment, including, but not limited to, emphysema and pulmonary patients. A residential customer dependent on life-support equipment shall be allocated a higher energy allocation than the average residential customer.

(2) "Life-support equipment" means that equipment which utilizes mechanical or artificial means to sustain, restore, or supplant a vital function, or mechanical equipment which is relied upon for mobility both within and outside of buildings. "Life-support equipment," as used in this subdivision, includes all of the following: all types of respirators, iron lungs, hemodialysis machines, suction machines, electric nerve stimulators, pressure pads and pumps, aerosol tents, electrostatic and ultrasonic nebulizers, compressors, IPPB machines, and motorized wheelchairs.

(3) The limited allowance specified in this subdivision shall also be made available to paraplegic and quadriplegic persons in consideration of the increased heating and cooling needs of those persons.

(4) The limited allowance specified in this subdivision shall also be made available to multiple sclerosis patients in consideration of the increased heating and cooling needs of those persons.

(5) The limited allowance specified in this subdivision shall also be made available to scleroderma patients in consideration of the increased heating needs of those persons.

(6) The limited allowance specified in this subdivision shall also be made available to persons who are being treated for a life-threatening illness or have a compromised immune system, if a licensed physician and surgeon or a person licensed pursuant to the Osteopathic Initiative Act certifies in writing to the utility that the additional heating or cooling allowance, or both, is medically necessary to sustain the life of the person or prevent deterioration of the person's medical condition.

(d) (1) The commission shall require that every electrical and gas corporation file a schedule of rates and charges providing baseline rates. The baseline rates shall apply to the first or lowest block of an increasing block rate structure which shall be the baseline quantity. In establishing these rates, the commission shall avoid excessive rate increases for residential customers, and shall establish an appropriate gradual differential between the rates for the respective blocks of usage.

(2) In establishing residential electric and gas rates, including baseline rates, the commission shall ensure that the rates are sufficient to enable the electrical corporation or gas corporation to recover a just and reasonable amount of revenue from residential customers as a class, while observing the principle that electricity and gas services are necessities, for which a low affordable rate is desirable and while observing the principle that conservation is desirable in order to maintain an affordable bill.

(3) At least until December 31, 2003, the commission shall require that all charges for residential electric customers are volumetric, and shall prohibit any electrical corporation from imposing any charges on residential consumption that are independent of consumption, unless those charges are in place prior to April 12, 2001.

(e) (1) Each electrical corporation and each gas corporation shall, in a timeframe consistent with its next general rate case, disclose on the billing statement of a residential customer all of the following:

(A) Cost per kilowatthour or gas therm per tier.

(B) Allocation of kilowatthour or gas therm per tier.

(C) Visual representation of usage and cost per tier.

(D) Usage comparison with prior periods.

(E) Itemized cost components in the bill to identify state and local taxes.

(F) Identification of delivery, generation, public purpose, and other charges.

(G) Contact information for the commission's Consumer Affairs Branch.

(2) An electrical corporation and a gas corporation shall make available online to residential customers both of the following:

(A) Examples of how conservation measures, including changing thermostat settings and turning off unused lights, could reduce energy usage and costs.

(B) Examples of how energy-saving devices and weatherization measures could reduce energy usage and costs.

(3) The commission may modify, adjust, or add to the requirements of this subdivision as the individual circumstances of each electrical corporation or gas corporation merits, or for master-meter customers, as individual circumstances merit.

(4) The commission shall, as part of the general rate case of an electrical corporation or gas corporation, assess opportunities to improve the quality of information contained in the utility's periodic billings.

(f) Wholesale electrical or gas purchases, and the rates charged therefor, are exempt from this section.

(g) Nothing contained in this section shall be construed to prohibit experimentation with alternative gas or electrical rate schedules for the purpose of achieving energy conservation.

SEC. 2. Section 739.11 is added to the Public Utilities Code, to read:

739.11. (a) For bills issued to customers of gas corporations and electrical corporations in which usage is estimated, it is the intent of the Legislature that, to the extent practicable, the methodology for estimation be simple, transparent, and cost effective to the customer, and produce reasonably accurate results.

(b) For each gas corporation and electrical corporation that, for some portion of residential customers, employs every-other-month meter reading and estimates bills for months when the customer's meter is not read, the commission shall direct the gas corporation or electrical corporation to include in its tariffs the methodology it employs to estimate bills for those months during which the meter is not read.

SEC. 3. Section 1.5 of this bill incorporates amendments to Section 739 of the Public Utilities Code proposed by both this bill and Assembly Bill 1292. That section shall become operative only if (1) both bills are enacted and become effective on or before January 1, 2018, (2) each bill amends Section 739 of the Public Utilities Code, and (3) this bill is enacted after Assembly Bill 1292, in which case Section 1 of this bill shall not become operative.

SEC. 4. No reimbursement is required by this act pursuant to Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution because the only costs that may be incurred by a local agency or school district will be incurred because this act creates a new crime or infraction, eliminates a crime or infraction, or changes the penalty for a crime or infraction, within the meaning of Section 17556 of the Government Code, or changes the definition of a crime within the meaning of Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution.