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Cut your heating costs

Free home weatherization kits, publications offered by CUB

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Seniors and low-income families could reduce energy costs by at least \$180 this year, according to a statewide consumer rights organization.

Concerned about the rising cost of utility and phone services for disadvantaged residents, the Citizens Utility Board is offering free home weatherization kits and money-saving publications that will be distributed to North Shore Gas customers this week.

Chicago-based CUB received a grant from the state attorney general's office to cover the cost of distributing 1,300 tote bags filled with money-saving materials in the North Shore Gas service area.

The grant is connected to a \$196 million legal agreement settled in 2006 involving Peoples Energy now Integrys Energy Group.

A lawsuit filed against the company in 2005 by Attorney General Lisa Madigan and the city of Chicago alleged that Peoples Energy devised a fraudulent scheme with Enron Corp. to overcharge natural gas customers by more than \$100 million from 1999 to 2002.

"We got a message for North Shore Gas customers who are weary of skyrocketing energy prices and out-of-control phone bills," said CUB director David Kolata. "We want the customers to know that they can cut costs even in the dead of winter."

The kits include four energy-efficient light bulbs, a window-insulating kits and materials for sealing gaps along windows, electrical outlets and doors.

"The light bulbs alone could save residents an estimated \$180 over the next five years if they are used frequently," Kolata said.

Along with the kits, publications will be distributed that explain to residents how to reduce their phone bills.

In recent years, the program has been successful in cutting customers' annual phone bills by an average of \$200.

In addition, phone customers have saved a little more than \$10 billion by restricting rate hikes and obtaining refunds from companies in Illinois since 1984, CUB said.

CUB is a nonprofit, statewide utility organization created by the Legislature in 1983 to represent the interests of residential and small-business utility customers.