

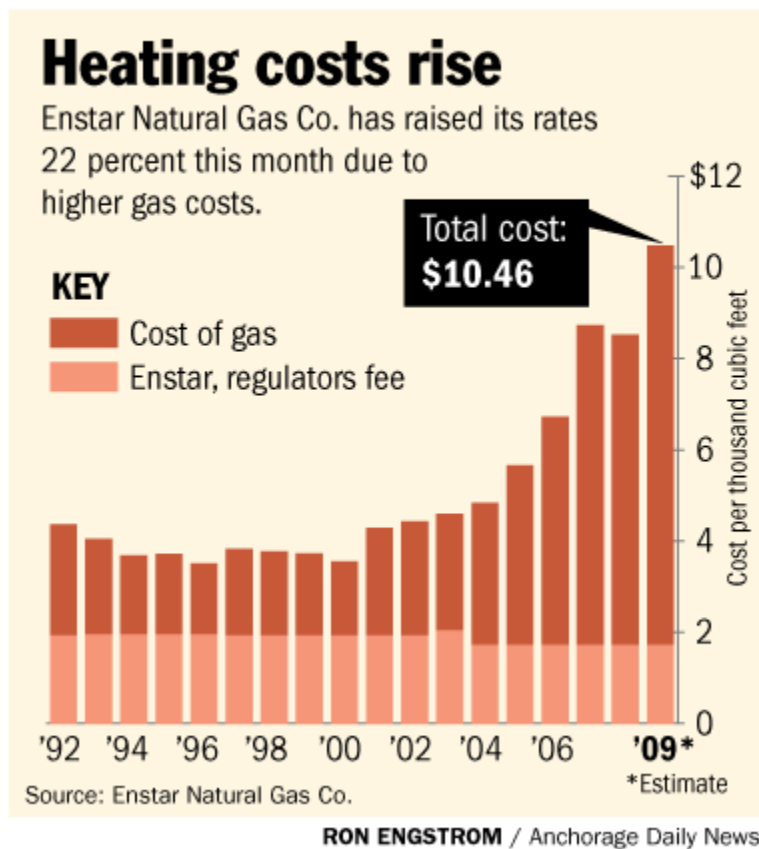
Anchorage energy use hits all-time high

COLD: Daily consumption of gas, electricity peaks.

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Published: January 6th, 2009 11:09 PM
Last Modified: January 6th, 2009 08:37 AM

Anchorage residents are burning through record levels of energy to keep their homes and businesses warm and lit during the long cold snap.



Cook Inlet natural gas supplies most of our energy needs, and on Saturday we used more of it than ever before.

Total gas flow to area customers that day totaled 234 million cubic feet, said Curtis Thayer, spokesman for local utility Enstar Natural Gas Co. The previous record was 227 million cubic feet set on Jan. 9, 2007.

All that gas consumption is going to cost local consumers -- maybe more than you realize.

Beginning this month, Enstar bills are increasing by about 22 percent. For the average house, it means an extra \$27 per month over the coming year, Thayer said.

The rate hike reflects the high prices for oil and gas in recent months. Enstar's supply contracts are linked to these price trends, Thayer said.

OK, so your gas bill is taking a painful rise. The good news is Enstar's distribution system is working well and its gas suppliers -- the oil companies operating wells around Cook Inlet -- are having no problems meeting demand during this string of subzero nights, Thayer said.

"The system is running excellent both on the producer side and the Enstar side," he said. "It's a lot of gas we're moving."

Enstar isn't the only utility setting records.

Chugach Electric Association, the largest power provider in Southcentral Alaska, on Sunday night set a new all-time system peak of 485 megawatts between 5 p.m. and 6 p.m., said Chugach spokesman Phil Steyer. The previous record was 479 megawatts between 6 p.m. and 7 p.m. on Jan. 9, 2007.

Not many people use electricity for heating in Anchorage, Steyer said. But the fans and pump in their gas-fired and baseboard heating systems, working harder than normal during the cold snap, use plenty of juice, he said. And people use more lights during these long, cold Alaska winter nights.

Chugach makes 90 percent of its electricity by burning natural gas; the remaining 10 percent comes from hydroelectric plants.

Spokespeople for major Cook Inlet gas producers say their wells, compressors and other facilities are working fine.

But some special steps are being taken to meet the priority energy demands of local homes and businesses.

One such step is diverting gas that normally goes into a Kenai Peninsula plant for conversion into liquefied natural gas for export to Asia.

The plant is now making less LNG as gas is rerouted to local utilities, said Erec Isaacson, a vice president with Conoco Phillips, the company that runs the LNG plant.

Roxanne Sinz, spokeswoman for Chevron, a top gas supplier to Enstar, said Tuesday her company's gas production is running normally through the cold snap.