



# News Release

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March 3, 2003

## **ATCO Delivers Customer Assistance: A New Six-Month Budget Program For Customers**

*High Winter Gas Costs Can Now Be Spread Through To Low-Use Summer Months*

CALGARY, Alberta – With a temporary spike in natural gas prices, ATCO Gas today announced an innovative new program which allows customers to spread high winter costs over the next six months.

President Jerome Engler said starting immediately ATCO Gas will, for the first time, offer a six-month budget plan to help customers who are having difficulty paying their bills.

Costs and usage vary dramatically from month to month, with consumers traditionally facing much higher bills during the cold winter months and much lower bills as usage significantly drops off and market prices traditionally decrease heading into the hot summer months.

Mr. Engler said the modified budget plan will allow customers to smooth payments into smaller equal amounts over the next six months instead of having to pay the full cost of high winter usage immediately each month.

“By spreading the payments for the remaining winter bills into the summer time, customers will be able to budget lower amounts for the next few months, and pay the balance over the summer time, when gas use is low and rates have come down,” said Mr. Engler. He encourages customers to call the ATCO Gas customer assistance centre at **310-5678 (toll free)** for further information.

“Albertans can also call our energy efficiency experts for advice on how to reduce their natural gas consumption,” added Mr. Engler. For ways to save energy in the home, customers can tour the on-line ATCO EnergySense house at [www.atcoenergysense.com](http://www.atcoenergysense.com). The EnergySense House is a useful tool designed to help consumers understand their natural gas and electricity costs.

As well, consumers can call ATCO’s toll-free advice line for a one-on-one discussion about their specific needs or to book a comprehensive home energy evaluation for a small cost.

ATCO Gas received approval from the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board (AEUB) last week to set the cost of gas for March for customers in southern Alberta at \$8.37 per, including two credit rate riders.

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However, the long term solution for addressing volatile natural gas prices is a truly competitive gas market which will offer competitively priced alternatives to Albertans.

ATCO announced December 10, 2002 an agreement to sell the retail operations of ATCO Gas and ATCO Electric to Direct Energy pending legislative changes to encourage fair competition and approval by the AEUB. Direct Energy, which hopes to be offering innovative new products and services to all Albertans this summer, is the largest energy retailer in North America.

ATCO Gas and ATCO Electric are part of the ATCO Group of Companies, a premier Alberta-based corporation operating worldwide in five business groups: Utilities, Logistics and Energy Services, Power Generation, Technologies, and Industrials.