

KUNI Radio Series “Unplugged”  
Show #46: Heating costs this winter

From the Center for Energy & Environmental Education at the University of Northern Iowa, this is Pat Higby with a series of programs on Iowa Public Radio KUNI to help you save energy.

At a recent conference a representative of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources gave a forecast of what we can expect to pay to heat our homes this coming winter. The news was a mix of good and bad. The National Weather Service is predicting the winter of 2006-2007 will be 6% colder than last winter, but that will still be slightly warmer than normal. This number lets us predict how **much** fuel we'll need, but what about the **price**?

If you heat with electricity, which has its rates regulated, the cost this winter will be about 5% more than last winter, so your total cost for heating with electricity is expected to be 8% more.

Most Iowans heat with natural gas, and the amount in storage now is higher than the 5-year average. That's good news, because with a better supply, prices are expected to be 18% less than last year. These savings are countered by the increased demand from a cooler winter, so you can expect your natural gas bill this winter to be about 14% **less** than last year.

12% of Iowans heat with propane, and those prices are slightly lower than last year. Unfortunately those savings are lost in the increased demand due to the cooler weather, so propane users can expect to pay 3% more than last year. The story for heating oil is similar, with costs expected to be 6% more than last year.

Whether you're a winner or loser in this numbers game, you are sure to save energy and money if you weatherize your home now. Check your windows, and replace old caulk. Add plastic film or replace the really leaky windows. Check your programmable thermostat to see if it still turns the furnace on and off to fit your lifestyle. If you don't have a programmable thermostat, get one!

Are you thinking about replacing an old furnace? Doing it **now** will save you money over the coming winter! Consider a geothermal or air source heat pump instead of a traditional furnace. New technologies in these products make them more cost effective and useable in our area. Contact your local utility for more information.

I'm Pat Higby, Energy Educator at the Center for Energy and Environmental Education at the University of Northern Iowa.

Sources: Presentation by Bill Blum, Iowa DNR, at the 2006 Iowa Association for Energy Efficiency conference on October 25, 2006.