

Integrys Energy Services



The Integrys Energy utilities; Michigan Gas Utilities (MGU), Minnesota Energy Resources (MERC), Wisconsin Public Service (WPS) and Upper Peninsula Power (UPPCO) have developed a proactive customer outreach program to identify “At-Risk” customers through data mining and provided information on energy assistance on in telephone calls, bill inserts, and online content.

As Mary J. Boettcher, Vice President, Customer Relations said, “It is so difficult for a utility to define and know who the new at-risk customers are and generally only find out who they are after a problem has occurred- like a job loss once the arrearages have increased.”

“Reaching the moderate to medium households will not be an easy task. Most of these households are not aware of assistance programs, and have never applied for any type of “public” assistance. They will also be somewhat hesitant to ask for help,” Ms. Boettcher added. “We will have to continue promoting the availability of these ‘temporary assistance’ funds in a way that is non-threatening and in a way that respects individual’s personal information as much as possible.”

This approach developed after talking with policy makers and regulators as a way to develop a more proactive rather than reactive stance. The core component of this program is the focus on customer communications. “There are different ways when to communicate with the customer, but we need to find a better way to target customers,” she said.

Customer communications included bill inserts, winter/cold weather protection programs; energy assistance programs and agency information; and fuel fund contribution promotions. The company also developed special websites that provide information on energy assistance and efficiency information/resources. It also ran an aggressive public communications program that included print and radio advertisements as well as press releases and presentations.



For its MERC subsidiary, the company was mandated to develop a program to provide assistance to at-risk customers. Integrys developed the Gas Affordability Program (GAP) and launched it in April 2008. This four-year pilot is funded by a monthly surcharge generating approximately \$1million per year. The surcharge is currently .00039/therm for all residential and commercial accounts except transportation customers. Program eligibility is based on household income and offers arrearage forgiveness. To date, more than 2,600 customers have enrolled and total funding has been approximately \$232,000. The customers have received matching funds of more than \$40,000 in arrearage forgiveness and overall payments have been more than \$200,000. The program is administered through the Salvation Army.

The company is also working actively to help at-risk customers in its other service territories. Recent program strategies include streamlining the application process for WPS customers and providing more than \$211,000 in assistance. The company also held several community outreach events in several Midwestern cities to promote winter preparedness and promote the availability of energy assistance programs.

Integrys- At a Glance

Integrys Energy Services, a subsidiary of Integrys Energy Group (NYSE: TEG), was established in 1994. The company, which has 423 employees, offers retail and wholesale products, primarily natural gas and electric