



We Energies

We Energies' experience with helping low-income customers, and those in crisis, is proving invaluable during this economic downturn. We Energies has several programs for low income customers, those with household incomes at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty guidelines that offer payment assistance for qualified customers.

But We Energies has gone beyond the traditional approach and has developed a comprehensive, holistic strategy that supports both lower-income customers and the larger community organizations that serve them.

First, We Energies is testing a comprehensive pilot program in its two largest counties, which serve 3,200 low-income customers. Under this program, the customer pays a flat amount based on the energy bill and household income. In addition, these customers also qualify for both energy assistance and weatherization funds. But there is a catch—the customers also must sign up for financial education classes and energy efficiency classes.

“The program goal is to change behavior and educate customers on energy use,” Joan Shafer, vice president of customer services for We Energies, explained. “If a customer can afford to pay the energy bill, he will. But a lot of these customers live in older housing and the poor quality housing stock drives up the energy bill. We teach them that behavior affects consumption.”

We Energies also looks for ways to support local communities. “We have set up Energy Networks in the four largest counties that work with these customers on a daily basis,” Ms. Shafer said. “These Energy Networks include representatives from the community organizations, interfaith organizations, social workers, United Way, 2-1-1, the food pantries and anyone else who works with customers in crisis. We want them to understand what services We Energies offers and how we can help them.” We host monthly meetings with representatives from these organizations and explain the services available and options open to customers facing payment challenges.

We Energies also is committed to helping customers who may be facing an energy crisis for the first time. “If the customer has an established credit history, is working with us, and is paying something towards the bill consistently, we will not disconnect them. We will work with those customers and share information on energy efficiency and how to manage their bills,” Ms. Shafer added.

Most importantly, Ms. Shafer stresses that the best tool for helping customers in financial difficulty is to really listen to what they are saying. “Customers say they can’t afford their energy bills in a variety of ways—saying it is too high, or the rates are too expensive. We have to be really good at listening to our customers and meeting their needs,” Ms. Shafer added.

We Energies not only listens to its customers, but it also provides them with the education to help empower them to make the decisions they need to lower their overall energy bills. “We want our customers to understand and be in control of their energy use.” Ms. Shafer explained.

.We Energies At-a-Glance

We Energies serves more than 1.1 million electric customers in Wisconsin and Michigan’s Upper Peninsula and more than 1 million natural gas customers in Wisconsin. We Energies is the trade name of Wisconsin Electric Power Company and Wisconsin Gas LLC, the principal utility subsidiaries of Wisconsin Energy Corporation (NYSE:WEC).