Communications Snapshot – Regulatory Amendments for Billing Requirements

Communications Objectives

- Propose a new invoicing regulation, as well as regulatory amendments, that would require electricity vendors and unit sub-meter providers (USMPs) to include messaging related to Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan (OFHP) on electricity invoices.
- Increase awareness of Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan for all electricity customers.

Context

- Beginning July 1, 2017, proposed regulations under the *Ontario Fair Hydro Plan Act*, 2017 (OFHPA) would require electricity vendors and USMPs to set out the following statement on invoices in a location where conservation or other utility messages are usually placed:

  > Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan substantially lowers electricity bills for typical residential consumers. This includes the eight percent rebate introduced in January 2017 and builds on previous initiatives to deliver broad-based relief on all electricity bills.

- Regulations would also require electricity vendors and USMPs to accompany paper invoices with a descriptive bill insert to be issued once every quarter within a 12-month period, beginning with the first invoice issued on or after July 1, 2017 until the first invoice issued on or after July 1, 2018. The insert must contain the following wording:

  > Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan
  > • Electricity bills will be lowered by 25 per cent on average for residential consumers
  > • Rate increases will be held to inflation for four years
  > • As many as half a million small businesses and farms will also benefit from this reduction
  > • Lower-income Ontarians and those living in eligible rural communities will receive even greater reductions, as much as a 40 to 50 per cent cut
  >
  > The benefit will vary for individual consumers depending on electricity usage and service territory. These measures include the eight per cent rebate introduced in January 2017 and build on previous initiatives to deliver broad-based relief on all electricity bills.
  >
  > To find out more, visit ontario.ca/FairHydroPlan.

- The words "Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan" and "Bringing electricity bills down" must also appear in a reasonably prominent location on the face of the bill insert.
- Proposed regulations under the OFHPA would also require electricity vendors servicing on-reserve customers to include a "First Nations Delivery Credit" as a visible line item on invoices and demonstrate the associated savings, as applicable.
- In anticipation of these new OFHP invoicing requirements, the ministry has amended O. Reg. 364/16 (Minister's order) to revoke the "8% provincial rebate" messaging requirements from invoices and envelopes to free-up space on the bill and avoid confusion amongst consumers. Note, the requirement for invoices to include an "8% Provincial Rebate" line item remains.
- All proposed regulations and regulatory amendments would take effect on July 1, 2017.

Target Audience

- All electricity consumers in Ontario.

- Consumer subgroups: Residential households, small businesses, farms, medium sized businesses (those not RPP-eligible or ICI-eligible), large businesses, municipalities, post-secondary institutions, schools, hospitals (MUSH sector).

Key Messages

- Ontario’s Fair Hydro Plan proposes new measures to lower electricity bills by 25 per cent on average for all residential households and as many as half a million small businesses and farms.
- As part of this plan, rate increases will be held to the rate of inflation for four years, managing affordability in the medium-term
- Our 2017 Long-Term Energy Plan will then focus on taking additional costs out of the system, and address affordability beyond the short and medium term.
- Lower-income Ontarians and those living in eligible rural communities would receive even greater reductions, as much as a 40 to 50 per cent cut.
- These measures include the eight per cent rebate introduced in January 2017 and build on previously announced initiatives to deliver broad-based rate relief on all electricity bills.
- Taken together, these changes will deliver the single-largest reduction to electricity rates in Ontario's history.

Issues & Mitigation

Issue/Consideration	Mitigation Strategy	Key Message
Individuals who claim bill inserts are unnecessary, added expense to ratepayers/LDCs	Iterate the importance of communicating with Ontarians about programs that will impact their daily lives in reactive messaging.	Our government has a responsibility to communicate information about programs that affect Ontarians' daily lives, which includes important changes to electricity bills. Utilities regularly inform their customers about important developments such as when the Ontario Energy Board updates time-of-use rates, the eight per cent rebate equivalent to the provincial portion of the HST, and updates to programs like the Ontario Electricity Support Program. We are simply following standard practice.

Strategic Approach

- Given that regulatory amendments are not public facing, a news release or announcement is not warranted.
- Energy will work with LDCs to ensure OFHP bill inserts and on-bill messaging is consistent.
- Energy will prepare comprehensive Q&As and key messages about bill changes and Ontario’s Fair Hydro Plan programs and provide them to LDCs.
- Collaborate with the Chiefs of Ontario to develop a postcard for on-reserve households about ensuring eligibility for the First Nations Delivery Credit.

Tactics & Rollout

	Pre-Launch	Launch	Post-Launch
Regional Rollout Examples: • MPP Template • Speeches • Media event • Op-ed, media pitch • Editorial board meeting	• n/a	• n/a	• n/a
Earned Examples: • News release, etc. • Remarks • Event • Calls/emails to targeted audiences • Multilingual media • Fact sheets • House Statement	• n/a	• n/a	• n/a
Digital / Social Examples: • Web content • Twitter/Facebook • Keyword / interactive web • Blogger outreach • Videos	• n/a	• n/a	• n/a
Paid ***(must include budget)*** Examples: - TV/radio/newspaper - Online banners/ads - Advertorial - Householder/direct mail	• n/a	• n/a	• n/a

Evaluation

- Comments received from the Regulatory Registry posting, which closes on June 10, 2017.
- Feedback from LDCs regarding customer questions, concerns.
- Scan social media for customer response.