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Today's News

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Date: Thursday, January 4, 2018
Edited by: John Cannella (John.Cannella@ieso.ca)

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No quick fix for Ontario's energy woes, electricity analyst says

CBC.CA News - Wed Jan 3 2018, 4:00pm ET
Byline:CBC News

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Canada Newswire - Wed Jan 3 2018

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Sarnia Observer - Thu Jan 4 2018
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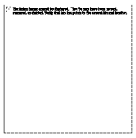

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No quick fix for Ontario's energy woes, electricity analyst says

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As political parties start rolling out promises on energy ahead of the coming election, an Ontario energy analyst says there's no quick fix to the province's energy system.

Tom Adams says political parties are promising simple fixes to the province's electricity system.

"The connection between those promises and the reality of our power situation gets more tenuous all the time," he said.

The Liberals say they plan to continue their Fair Hydro Plan, which reduced bills for households by 25 per cent last year. However, opposition parties and analysts have been critical of the accounting behind the plan.

"It looks like magic and it turns out there's less magic than first appeared," Adams said.

"So it's all borrowing. The provincial financial accountability officer and the auditor general ? have come down solidly opposed."

Living with electricity history

Adams says initially, the Progressive Conservatives aligned themselves with the accountability officer and auditor general on that criticism.

"They were sharply critical of the so-called Fair Hydro Plan and the phoney 25 per cent rate cut until they decided that their main criticism of the Fair Hydro Plan is that it doesn't go far enough," he said.

Adams says the history of Ontario's hydro system has created what's in placed now.

"The reality of the situation we're in is that there are no simple solutions for this," he said.

"The situation is we've got a lot of electricity history that we've got to live with."

'An issue that can never go away'

The NDP hasn't released a plan yet for the June election, but last year, stated a plan to cut back rates by 30 per cent and buy back shares from Hydro One.

"This notion of buying back the Hydro One shares I think is very problematic," he said.

"The current shareholders are going to want to be bought out at fair market price. That is going to generate a lot of extra costs."

Adams says there is no quick fix, but advises people not to turn to politicians for answers on the province's energy system.

"One of the fundamental problems with Ontario's power situation is over the course of years, we've gotten in the habit of looking to our politicians as the source of all the solutions," he said.

"Electricity is to Ontario politics what language is to Quebec politics. It's just an issue that can never go away."

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Ontario's official debut on the carbon market

Canada Newswire - Wed Jan 3 2018

Canada NewsWire

MONTRÉAL, Jan. 3, 2018

MONTRÉAL, Jan. 3, 2018 /CNW Telbec/ - Énergir, the new Gaz Métro, applauds Ontario's official entry into the carbon market, took place on January 1. Initially formed of Québec and California, Ontario's entry strengthen what is the largest market of its kind in North America. The three parties signed an agreement on the harmonization of the cap-and-trade system which allow business in Ontario to participate in carbon market trading and to continue their transition toward a lower-carbon economy.

"In order to reach the greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction objectives in Québec, we must first encourage citizens and businesses to reduce their energy consumption through properly adapted energy efficiency programs. Beyond that, GHG residual emissions must be reduced or offset in a variety of ways, including through the carbon market. We are delighted to see a third major player join us in this effort. The carbon market and the fight against climate change are opportunities for Québec, California, and now Ontario to move toward a greener economy, and we are proud to be a part of it," said Stéphanie Trudeau, Senior Vice President, Regulatory, Customers and Communities at Énergir.

Ontario's formally participation in the carbon market is an opportunity to support local GHG emission reduction projects, including through the purchase of offset credits. In Québec alone, Énergir has bought over $7.5 million in eight offset credit projects since January 2015, which has allowed it to encourage Québec businesses that strive to reduce GHG emissions. These projects have made it possible to permanently reduce greenhouse gas emissions by more than 500,000 metric tonnes of CO_2 equivalent by eliminating GHGs found in old refrigerators and biogas from landfills. Énergir is committed to prioritizing offset purchase in innovative projects that help fight climate change and that stimulate Québec's green economy, and now that of Ontario as well.

About Énergir

With more than $7 billion in assets, Énergir is a diversified energy company whose mission is to meet the energy needs of its 520,000 customers and the communities it serves in an increasingly sustainable way. In Québec, it is the leading natural gas distribution company and also produces, through its subsidiaries, electricity from wind power. In the United States, through its subsidiaries, the company operates in nearly fifteen states, where it produces electricity from hydraulic, wind and solar sources, in addition to being the leading electricity distributor and the sole natural gas distributor in Vermont. Énergir values energy efficiency and invests both resources and efforts in innovative energy projects such as renewable natural gas and liquefied and compressed natural gas. Through its subsidiaries, it also provides a variety of energy services. Énergir hopes to become the partner of choice for those striving toward a better energy future.

www.energir.com/pressroom

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Utilities scramble to collect cold cash amid deep freeze

Sarnia Observer - Thu Jan 4 2018
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Unpaid bills mounting. A new law preventing delinquent customers from being cut off until the ground thaws.

A weeks-long deep freeze that's plunged Southwestern Ontario into dangerously cold lows.

A perfect storm is bearing down on regional power and heating utilities, scrambling to collect overdue accounts from winter-battered ratepayers as the region braces for more snow and numbing cold.

The number of London Hydro accounts in arrears has skyrocketed to nearly 4,400 from about 2,000 as of Nov. 20.

Chatham-based Union Gas, the region's major natural gas distributor, has been busy fielding a flurry of calls from customers struggling to pay up, too.

In sharp contrast to a year ago, when the region emerged from the warmest December on record in Ontario, the brutal reality of subzero cold is hitting the pocketbook earlier for many who can't afford the deep freeze.

And cold temperatures are expected to last into the weekend.

"It puts a lot of stress on us," Nancy Hutton, a spokesperson for London Hydro, said Wednesday.

"Bad debts affect all customers eventually, and we have to make sure those arrears are eventually collected so that we can keep rates down for all Londoners."

Out of London Hydro's approximately 150,000 monthly payments from customers, 1,200 are due now, 2,000 are a month past due and 1,100 are three months past their deadline, said Ward 1 Coun. Michael Van Holst, who sits on the utility's board.

There are several reasons for the spike in unpaid bills, Hutton said, but the real game-changer came from Queen's Park.

Ontario's law banning wintertime utility disconnections sped through the legislature late last February, making this the first full winter the law is on the books.

The Protecting Vulnerable Energy Consumers Act prevents utilities from cutting off service for non-payment between November and March.

Couple that with the unseasonable cold snap and lake-effect snow squalls this week, and it's a recipe for higher-than-normal electricity usage.

Hutton said the temporary disconnection ban may have reduced some people's incentive to pay up on time.

Though London Hydro has used disconnections as a last resort for years, customers facing steep bills may feel safer deferring payment knowing their electricity can't be cut off by law.

"The number of accounts in arrears has increased dramatically. It is very unfortunate," said Hutton.

"Knowing that we can't disconnect, some people don't bother to keep in touch with us."

But interest accumulates on unpaid bills, and months of outstanding balances add up quickly, leading to even bigger problems in the spring, Hutton said.

London Hydro is trying to reach delinquent account holders, connect low-income households struggling to make payments with utility-support programs and get people on repayment plans before bills become unmanageable.

"We try to work with the customers," said Hutton, adding collectors who once handed out disconnection warnings now deliver calling cards.

"We send them reminders and we have our collectors leave information about how they can reach out to us to make payment arrangements so they won't get into a situation in the springtime."

For people unable to pay their power or natural gas bills, help is available year-round, said Union Gas spokesperson Andrea Stass.

A provincewide program, administered locally by the Salvation Army, can provide as much as $500 for electricity and $500 for natural gas bills - or about six months worth of gas payments to eligible families, said Stass.

Both Union Gas and London Hydro participate in the program. In 2017, about $200,000 in Union Gas money was allocated to 433 low-income households in the London and Sarnia-Lambton area, Stass said.

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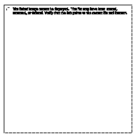

314240065

Electricity rates increase

Brantford Expositor - Thu Jan 4 2018
Byline: Vincent Ball
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Customers of Brantford Power will be paying more for electricity this year.

An increase in the electricity distribution rates and other charges for all Brantford Power customers has been approved by the Ontario Energy Board. The increase came into effect Jan. 1.

For the typical residential Brantford Power customers who consume 750 kilowatt hours (kWH) of electricity per month the increase means their bill will go up 1.5 per cent or $1.60 a month. At present, the typical residential consumer pays about $105.52 a month for electricity.

The $105.52 figure applies to the typical residential customer who doesn't purchase electricity from a retailer and who follows the Ontario Energy Board's prescribed time-ofuse consumption pattern. The prescribed pattern recommends using 65 per cent of the energy consumed during off-peak hours, 17 per cent during mid-peak hours and 18 per cent during the peak hours.

Other factors that can impact a monthly electricity bill includes support received from provincial and local social assistance programs and purchasing electricity from a retailer.

"This rate adjustment has been approved by the Ontario Energy Board to allow us to recover the ongoing costs of providing safe, high-quality and reliable services to the community of Brantford, and to renew assets and modernize our system for the future," Paul Kwasnik president and CEO of Brantford Power Inc. said in a news release.

For general service customers such as small businesses that have a peak demand of less than 50 kilowats (kW) and that consume less than 2,000 kWh will see their monthly bill rise by 47 cents a month or 0.2 per cent.

Brantford Power delivers electricity to about 40,000 customers.

The adjusted rates cover the costs of designing, building and maintaining overhead and underground lines, poles, stations and local transformers. The rates also cover requests for day-to-day services and responding to emergencies such as power outages and are part of the "delivery" line of a customer's bills.

Brantford Power's distribution rates account for about 22 per cent of a typical residential customer's bill.

Electricity rates in Ontario are regulated by the energy board on behalf of consumers.

Brantford Power undergoes a cost of service review which is a public review of its projected costs every five years. In between those years, applications are submitted annually for rate adjustments to allow Brantford Power to keep up with inflation.

All rate changes must be reviewed by the energy board and are only approved if deemed by the regulator to be reasonable and fair.

To learn more about the impact of the change on the monthly bill visit www.ontarioenergyboard.ca. Vball@postmedia.com twitter.com/EXPVBall

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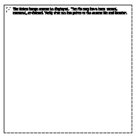

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How Alberta achieved Canada's lowest renewable-electricity prices

The Globe and Mail - Mon Jan 1 2018
Byline: JEREMY BARRETTO
Page: B4

Calgary-based energy and environmental lawyer with Osler, Hoskin & Harcourt LLP

The Alberta government scored its Boxing Day bargains early. On Dec. 13, Premier Rachel Notley announced that Alberta set a new record by procuring the lowest priced renewable electricity in Canada.

Alberta achieved these rock-bottom prices by establishing a competitive auction process to award renewable-electricity contracts to low bidders as the centrepiece of its policy.

The results from this competition have implications for the development of renewable electricity in Alberta and across the country. Provinces and companies are taking a fresh look at locking in low renewable-electricity prices under long-term contracts in order to reduce their exposure to price volatility.

Alberta will run an additional renewable-electricity competition next year as part of its Renewable Electricity Program (REP).

The province will also face pressure to justify its nascent climate policies over the long term.

In November, 2015, the Alberta government announced its Climate Leadership Plan, which will phase out coal-fired electricity and replace it with renewable electricity and natural gas-fired electricity by 2030. By this time, renewable sources will account for up to 30 per cent of electricity generation in the province.

To meet Alberta's renewableelectricity target, the government tasked the Alberta Electric System Operator (AESO) with development of the REP, which is a competitive process intended to encourage the development of 5,000 megawatts (MW) of renewable-electricity generation capacity to the Alberta grid between now and 2030.

The use of a competitive auction process was key to Alberta's success. Under the REP, bidders submit their lowest acceptable price for their proposed renewable projects. The winning bidders are awarded a 20-year contract with the AESO for all electricity and renewable attributes generated by the projects in exchange for the fixed-bid price for the electricity.

If the bid price exceeds the Alberta power pool price (i.e., the electricity price), then the AESO pays the generator the difference. However, if the bid price is less than the Alberta power pool price, then the generator pays the difference to the AESO.

This competition structure puts downward pressure on the cost of renewable projects.

The REP attracted significant interest from renewable-energy developers from across Canada and abroad. Twelve renewableenergy companies submitted bid prices for 26 projects in the first REP competition, representing 3,600 MW of renewable electricity.

The first REP competition awarded contracts for nearly 600 MW of wind generation, enough to power approximately 255,000 homes. A total of four wind projects developed by the following three companies were selected in the first REP competition: Capital Power Corporation, Enel Green Power Canada, Inc. and EDP Renewables Canada Ltd. The weighted-average bid price came in at $37/MWh or 3.7C/ a kilowatt-hour (kWh). By comparison, other provinces have recently awarded wind projects long-term contracts for more than double this price.

The Alberta government is expected to announce details for an additional REP competition in the first half of 2018. The low prices demonstrate that the first REP competition was a success.

However, key questions remain for future rounds regarding additional social, technological or environmental requirements that could be added to the REP.

Such requirements could add certain benefits, but also increase bid prices.

The first REP competition was technology-neutral among forms of renewable energy such as wind, solar and bioenergy.

This helped to obtain the lowest possible prices among all forms of renewable electricity. However, as a result, no solar-energy projects were awarded contracts in the first REP round. Although solar projects may involve higher initial costs, they offer unique benefits, such as generating power closer to when and where people use it. The government will need to consider these factors if it intends to award contracts to solar projects in future REP competitions.

Other provinces have required some form of involvement from Indigenous groups in proposed projects. For example, Saskatchewan's electrical utility announced plans to award contracts for two 10-MW solar projects in partnership with the First Nations Power Authority. In order to create incentives for increased Indigenous participation in the REP, Alberta would likely need to require increased Indigenous engagement in REP bids.

The short-term forecast for renewable electricity in Alberta is bright, with scattered clouds in the years ahead. The long-term future of the REP largely depends on whether future Alberta governments continue the policy of creating incentives for the development of renewable electricity to replace a portion of phased-out coal generation. The ultralow renewable-electricity prices help to make the case for continuing the REP as well as similar competitions in other provinces.

Corporations may also look to lock in low renewable-electricity prices through long-term agreements - particularly if Alberta's power pool price increases to more than the winning REP bid price, as it has in recent years.

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