

High temps mean high utility bills during hot, dry summer

Written by Darci Tomky

If City of Holyoke residents were surprised by their utility bill for the month of July, they were certainly not alone.

Many people have grumbled about their utility costs, but it should have been expected due to the hot, dry weather Holyoke has been experiencing this summer. Holyoke recorded seven days at 100 degrees or more followed up by a whopping 11 days in July.

It's no wonder residents saw an increase in their utility bills.

"It's higher, but not horrendously higher," said city superintendent Mark Brown, comparing the electric usage this July to July of last year.

He said as the temperatures rise, they watch their loads rise as well, but he added it's not causing the city any grief because they can handle the increase. The system capacity is not a problem.

Residents are experiencing a rise in costs because they are using more electricity, but Brown said that just because Holyoke's total usage is much higher, that doesn't mean the peak demand had that much of an increase.

He used the analogy of a garden hose. The amount of gallons running through the hose per minute does not change, but the total amount of gallons of water used in a day increases.

In addition to the high use of air conditioners this summer, the water usage for watering lawns is also way up from last year. "The two wells are running so much more than they ever did," said Brown.

He said in the past Holyoke tried water rationing, but residents ended up using more water than they normally would since they knew they could only water on certain days, so that might not always be the best plan.

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Holyoke received around one inch of rain in June, with just over two and a half inches in July.

Brown advised residents to cut down on their utilities as much as possible in order to cut down on their bills.

He is excited for the approaching fall season, which will mean a decrease in temperatures, and, like everyone else, Brown is always hoping for more rain.

Cool ideas to beat the heat and save money

Just because it's summer doesn't mean the air condition needs to run 24/7. Try these ideas to stay cool and save a little money on the next utility bill.

—Use a fan to circulate air. If a cool breeze isn't making it indoors, use a fan to draw in air from outside. If hot air is trapped inside, use a fan in the opposite direction to draw warm air out. Also, consider installing ceiling fans to help air circulate throughout larger rooms.

—Draw the curtains or blinds to minimize the amount of heat that will build up due to sunlight. Cover south- and west-facing windows with black-out curtains to minimize heat gain from the sun.

—Protect the home with features like awnings and shade trees on the south- and west-facing

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windows.

—Keep windows closed during hot days, and open them up at night when the temperature has cooled off.

—Move to a lower level of the home where it tends to be cooler since heat rises.

—Wear natural fabrics like cotton and linen to keep cool. Light-colored clothing will reflect the sun's rays. Dark clothing will absorb the heat.

—Spend time in a sprinkler, pool or other source of water.

—Fill up the bathtub with cool water and take a dip or take a cold shower.

—Wet a shirt or a bandana and wear it. The combination of the wet item of clothing and a slight breeze can cool people down quickly.

—Use a water bottle mister and a fan to provide a cooling sensation.

—Feeling hot when trying to sleep can lead to a restless night. Chill a pillowcase in the freezer and sleep on the cool surface. The body radiates heat from the hands, feet, face and ears, so cooling any of these with chilled washcloths will efficiently cool the body.

—Use food to help cool down the body. Many people in warmer climates eat spicy foods. These foods can cause them to perspire more and thus cool down faster. If spicy doesn't sound appealing, go for cold foods, such as ices, ice cream and cold fruit.

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—Always drink plenty of cold beverages that are free of alcohol, sodium and caffeine.

—Peppermint has a cooling sensation. Peppermint oil on your skin or menthol products can also help people feel cooler.

—Slice a thin piece of cold cucumber and stick it in the middle of the forehead. This starts to work immediately.

—Make sure when the air conditioner is running, it is running properly and efficiently. Clean or replace the filters regularly, and consider using a programmable thermostat.

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