

# Utility eyes Franklin for regional office

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Indiana Gas' Franklin office will convert to a regional customer center serving seven counties when a companywide reorganization plan becomes effective today.

The changeover, which could take as long as seven months, could mean between 110 to 130 new employees will report to the Franklin regional office, said company spokeswoman Deborah New at the utility's Indianapolis headquarters. The regional office will serve 79,000 of the utility's 356,865 customers.

Indiana Gas' plan, its first major reorganization in 25 years, will eliminate 27 local offices. Those local offices will be consolidated into six regional centers. The utility also is seeking permission to merge its natural gas operations with Terre Haute Gas Corp. and Richmond Gas Corp. Additionally, Indiana Gas is asking one out of every six employees to accept early retirement.

The regional reorganization came about partly because of changes in

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**Deborah New**  
Indiana Gas spokeswoman

the utility industry and changing lifestyles of customers, New said.

"Over time we have seen fewer and fewer customers use our local offices on a regular basis. We have found that by centralizing our efforts and creating new programs, we will be able to offer more service than before at a reasonable cost," New said.

The Franklin regional center will serve the communities of Columbus, Danville, Greensburg, Martinsville, Rushville, Seymour and Shelbyville.

Each of those communities now has its own Indiana Gas district office.

Some current Indiana Gas employees working at those locations will be given the option of transferring to new jobs at the Franklin regional center, New said. Interviews have been taking place for several weeks as current employees seek new jobs at the regional centers.

Between 50 and 70 employees will be based at the Franklin regional center when it becomes fully opera-

tioned. A total of 150 to 170 employees, including sales representatives and service employees, will report to the regional office. Currently 40 people are employed at the Franklin office.

At some point, the employees being reassigned to regional offices will be asked to report there as soon as possible, New said. Those employees will be doing double duty, working at both the regional offices and district offices until the district offices are phased out.

New stressed that the transition will occur gradually.

"We are going to be keeping the district offices open until it makes sense to close them," New said.

The utility is trying to work out an agreement to have a major retailer and a bank accept payments from customers in communities where the customer offices will close.

Indiana Gas officials know some sort of expansion must occur for the Franklin office to become a regional center, but are uncertain when and how it will be done.

Company officials have not decided

whether to build onto the current office at 1126 N. Main St., to lease a new facility or to construct a new building, New said.

An employee committee, one of 40 employee committees assisting with the reorganization plan, will study the options and make recommendations about each regional center, New said.

Other changes that are part of the reorganization plan are a centralized credit and collections department based in Indianapolis that will accept toll-free calls from customers, a toll-free number that customers may call 24 hours a day to pay their bills by credit card, and an outreach program in communities where Indiana Gas closed its district offices.

The early retirement plan was announced to Indiana Gas employees in December. Employees who are 55 years or older and have 10 years of service at Indiana Gas will be eligible for early retirement.

Indiana Gas expects that 150 employees will opt for early retirement when the May 15 deadline arrives.

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