

Indiana Gas to pare service offices to 6

Banks, big retailers may agree to collect bills

The Indianapolis News

Indiana Gas Co. this month begins a plan to cut its customer service offices from 27 to 6.

The consolidation of offices will be completed in October, company officials announced.

"Hurt most in the process will be customers who make a habit of paying their bills for natural gas service at Indiana Gas offices," said Julie A. Vincent, a spokeswoman for the company.

But those customers will be aided by Indiana Gas' plans to make arrangements with banks and major retailers. They will collect bills for the utility.

Indiana Gas serves 357,000 customers in 47 counties of central and southern Indiana. Indianapolis, however, is served by Citizens Gas & Coke Utility.

Here's how the reduction of offices will affect central Indiana:

- The Noblesville office will serve 81,400 customers now served by offices in Lebanon,

According to Indiana Gas, employees responsible for responding to service calls and maintaining Indiana Gas' system will continue to be based in many locations so they can respond to problems quickly.

Elwood, Anderson and Greenfield, as well as Noblesville.

- The Franklin office will serve 79,400 customers now served by offices in Danville, Martinsville and Shelbyville, as well as Franklin.

The other four offices to be operated by Indiana Gas will be at Lafayette, Bloomington, Muncie and Clarksville.

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At their annual meeting Wednesday, shareholders of Indiana Energy, the Indianapolis-based parent company of Indiana Gas, agreed to a \$62 million purchase of Terre Haute Gas and Richmond Gas. The two companies will add 47,000 customers to those already served by Indiana Gas.

Most of the purchase price will be paid in stock of Indiana Energy.

The purchase is subject to federal approval, which is expected by April. In addition, Indiana Gas, Terre Haute Gas and Richmond Gas have asked state regulators to let the three companies merge into one company, Indiana Gas.

Also Wednesday, Gerald L. Bepko, chancellor of Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis, was elected a director of Indiana Energy. Bepko replaces Donald C. Danielson, vice chairman of City Securities Corp., who is leaving Indiana Energy's board after 18 years of service.

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