

Electricity, gas rates to climb

Puget Sound Energy customers will see electric and natural gas rates nudge upward soon.

The state Utilities and Transportation Commission approved a rate increase for the utility April 2. The decision allows the Bellevue-based company to raise electric rates by about 2.8 percent and natural gas prices by 0.8 percent.

Officials expected the new rates to take effect on or about April 7.

The average PSE residential electric customer using 1,000 kilowatt-hours a month will see a hike of about \$2.80. The average natural-gas customer using 70 therms a month will pay about 87 cents more.

The commission also approved charges last week to fund conservation programs. The totals for the PSE programs amount to \$1.78 more a month for residential elec-

tric customers and 45 cents extra for natural gas customers.

Including both increases, the monthly bill will rise to about \$97 for electric and \$80 for natural gas service for the average residential customer.

The commission also agreed to raise the basic service charge for electric customers to \$7.25 per month from \$7. The basic service charge for natural gas customers will remain \$10 per month.

The commission received 630 public comments on the rate increase proposal — with five in favor, 606 opposed and 19 undecided.

The three-member commission regulates private, investor-owned electric and natural gas utilities in Washington. PSE serves more than 1 million electric customers and about 750,000 natural gas customers in Western Washington.