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State regulators to hold meetings on Washington Natural Gas proposed rate increase

OLYMPIA, WA. -- The Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (WUTC) will hold three public hearings in the Puget Sound area to hear customers' views on a proposed rate increase requested by Washington Natural Gas Co.

The first meeting will begin at 9:30 a.m. Monday, May 24 in the Tacoma PUD Auditorium, 3628 S. 35th St., in Tacoma. A second public meeting is scheduled that afternoon at 4:30 in the Port of Seattle Commission Room, Pier 69, 2711 Alaskan Way, in Seattle. The third and final meeting will take place at 1:30 p.m. Wednesday, May 26 at the commission's headquarters, 1300 S. Evergreen Park Dr. S.W., Olympia.

The three-member commission will make a decision in late September as to what rate the Seattle-based gas company will be allowed to charge its 400,000 commercial, residential and industrial customers in Western Washington. The rates would become effective in the fall.

Last month, the commission staff recommended that the utility company reduce gas rates by \$22.2 million, not raise them by \$41 million, which is the original sum requested by the company for approval by the WUTC.

Under the company's proposal, the average residential customer would experience a \$7.60 increase in monthly gas bills. If the WUTC staff recommendation is approved by the commissioners, customers could see a drop of about \$2.84 a month in monthly bills.

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