

# Community OUTREACH

News to the Neighborhoods from Memphis Light, Gas and Water Division

January/February 2009



## Here's How Online

"There are lots of ways to save energy in your home," states **Chris Stanley**, Lead, Media Relations, as he introduces several new do-it-yourself videos featured on [mlgw.com](http://mlgw.com) about how to save on energy and utility costs.

The new *Here's How* videos are part of the Division's efforts to help its customers conserve energy and save on their utility bills. It's a component of MLGW's larger effort to improve customer service and increase satisfaction.

"In this series, we'll show you simple 'how-to' projects that will improve your energy efficiency and reduce your energy costs," Stanley continues in the video introduction. "We'll give you step-by-step instructions on how to complete each task."

Some projects in the videos will save more money than others, but put them all together and you've put a real dent in your energy bill! So get out your hammers, caulking guns, screwdrivers, etc.; log on to [www.mlgw.com](http://www.mlgw.com); click on the "Here's How Videos" link at top right and get started on your own energy-saving project.

## MLGW Proposes Ordinance to Aid Rental Customers

Leaky plumbing, lack of insulation, and poorly working heating and cooling units can lead to higher utility bills. For a homeowner, it's a no-brainer – fix the problems. But what can a renter do? To help, MLGW has proposed an ordinance to the City Council that would require rental property owners to make their properties meet energy-efficient standards.

If approved, the ordinance would require rental property owners in Memphis to make their properties energy efficient by ensuring plumbing systems are free of leaks, heating and cooling systems and other appliances are properly installed and working, exterior holes/openings are sealed, and that there is proper insulation.

Although some believe that there are already enough rules, MLGW still finds tenants living in energy-deficient conditions when it conducts energy audits. For these tenants, the condition of the home, its heating and cooling equipment or both, may be causing them to have higher utility bills.

The goal of the ordinance is to help low-income customers and hold landlords accountable for maintaining their property. "There are too many people on fixed incomes who have very high bills because they live in inefficient housing," says MLGW President **Jerry Collins Jr.** "We need to fix the problem."

The ordinance is targeted at owners of single-family rental homes and apartment buildings, and inspections would be performed by designated MLGW employees. Violations of the proposed ordinance would be heard in Environmental Court and property owners could be fined \$50 a day. The Council will consider the ordinance early this year.



*Jerry Collins Jr.,  
MLGW President & CEO*

## Bird on a Wire Turns One

In the world of social media, it's all about interaction and establishing a core group that keeps coming back for more. MLGW's Bird on a Wire has achieved that and more as the Division-sponsored blog celebrates its one-year anniversary.

**Stacey Greenberg**, Communications and PR, who authors and maintains the blog, says it takes a lot of attention to keep it fresh and interesting. You have to stay on top of it every day. Much of her subject matter deals

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# WINTER Time to Think Safety!

When it gets cold, and you're trying to heat your home, home heating and natural gas safety become very important. Here are some safety tips:

**Space Heater Safety** – Portable heaters are responsible for more than 4,000 fires in U.S. homes each year and 40 percent of heating-related deaths. Please use them safely!

- Do not place your space heater near flammable items like drapes, clothes, furniture, bedding or paper – they are a dangerous fire hazard!
- Do not use space heaters overnight when everyone is asleep.
- Never touch a portable heater if the floor or any part of your body is wet.
- Make sure your space heater has no frayed wires. Do not plug space heaters into outlets or extension cords with several other items.

**Natural Gas Safety** – Natural gas is a safe, efficient energy form when used properly. A correct natural gas flame burns steady and blue.

- Flames with yellow-orange tips, dancing flames, flames producing a hissing noise and flames without a defined shape are signs of incomplete combustion. Get a qualified repairman to fix the appliance.
- Never use your stove to help heat your home. It can be a fire and carbon monoxide hazard.
- **Natural Gas Leaks** – Natural gas is treated with mercaptan to give it a distinct smell like rotten eggs, so that leaks can be easily detected. If you smell a gas leak:
  - Open windows and evacuate building immediately.
  - Do not smoke, or use anything that produces an open flame or spark.
  - Do not operate equipment powered by batteries or electricity, including light switches, flashlights, or cell or landline phones. The slightest spark could cause an explosion.
  - Call MLGW's emergency line (528-4465 - emergencies only) from a phone located away from the building, then stay out until MLGW has deemed it safe to return.

**Carbon Monoxide Safety** – Carbon monoxide is a deadly vapor produced by incomplete combustion of natural gas and other fossil fuels. It is odorless and invisible. Signs of carbon monoxide poisoning include nausea, headaches, dizziness and fatigue. If you suspect carbon monoxide exposure, seek medical help immediately.

The best way to avoid carbon monoxide is to have all natural gas appliances inspected and serviced annually by a professional. Make sure your natural gas appliances are properly vented.

## Bird on a Wire *continued from page 1*

with energy conservation, green initiatives and tips you can use to help you save on your energy bill.

"We have a good group of regular readers," says Stacey. "We get about 300 hits a week – over 14,000 for the year so far. People are pleasantly surprised to see that we have a blog and that it's positive."

Not many utilities maintain a blog, so in that respect, Greenberg thinks MLGW is ahead of the curve. "As a company, it was time for us to enter social media – it's an opportunity to demystify MLGW," she says. "And we've been able to take negatives and turn them into positives."

Most of the comments and feedback have been positive, and rants – being bombarded was something company officials worried about – have been few, almost negligible. Bird on a Wire is geared toward open, friendly discussion, and customers are encouraged to participate and make comments.

Not all the subject matter is utility related. Posts have addressed plastic bags, taking the bus, and "green" issues which "get people to come out of the woodwork and respond," says Greenberg. "The ones I enjoy doing the most are 'in-the-field' posts. I go out with MLGW employees – meter readers, substation engineers, the Energy Doctor and others – to see what their jobs are like. They're the most interesting to write about. I've learned so much more about the company that I didn't know before."

So what's on the horizon? Greenberg plans to post links to MLGW's new "Here's How" videos online (see separate story, page 1). There will be a new logo and links, and hopefully more interaction. That's where you come in. Check out Bird on a Wire at [www.mlgw.blogspot.com](http://www.mlgw.blogspot.com) and make comments, get involved. You might learn something that can help you save money on your utility bill.



## MLGW INCREASES PLUS-1 FUNDRAISING

With falling temperatures, normally come rising utility costs. Those rising costs coupled with the faltering economy will make it even more difficult for those already struggling to make ends meet. With this in mind, MLGW has increased its efforts to raise funds for utility assistance through the Plus-1 program.

Plus-1 is a utility assistance program administered by the Metropolitan Inter-Faith Association (MIFA) that provides one-time utility assistance for those facing an unforeseen financial crisis. The program is mainly funded by MLGW customers through one-time donations or by adding a dollar or more to their utility bill each month.

To aid the program, the MLGW Board of Commissioners recently approved a resolution allowing for excess revenue from MLGW's pole attachment fees to go to Plus-1, which will provide more than \$25,000 for the program this year. This summer, MLGW launched an employee campaign to increase the funds contributed to Plus-1 by its employees.

MLGW also enlisted the support of Mayors Willie Herenton and AC Wharton in its fundraising efforts who declared Sunday, December 7, 2008, Plus-1 Sunday. On this day, congregations were asked to help those less fortunate by having a special collection dedicated to Plus-1.

Although Plus-1 Sunday has passed, it's not too late to help. Congregations can still help by taking a special collection and forwarding the proceeds to MLGW Corporate Communications. Individuals can help by making a one-time contribution or by adding one dollar or more to their utility bill. For more information on making a contribution or to sign up for the program, visit [www.plus1memphis.org](http://www.plus1memphis.org) or call MLGW Customer Care Center at 544-MLGW.

# Plus-1

## MLGW in the Community

MLGW's Communications and Public Relations department is always active in community outreach and volunteer programs. Recent community events where MLGW provided staff, informational booths, volunteers and programs included:

- American Diabetes Association Walk – Nov. 1
- The Business of Being a Church Conference – Friday, Nov. 14
- Project MAX volunteer weekend event – Friday, Nov. 21
- Memphis Recovery Centers' 5K Run/ Walk – Nov. 22, Overton Park
- Christmas Kettle Campaign – Dec. 1-19, Walgreens at Main and Madison

*Call 528-4820 to request MLGW Community Relations staff to attend your event.*



**The Business of Being a Church Conference attendee Emma Pearson (left) and presenter Furniss Harkness, Funeral Consumers Alliance, prepare for the Business of Being a Church Conference at MLGW's Joyce C. Blackmon Training Center November 14.**

## Community Conservation Day Returns

MLGW employees will again staff informational tables at several Exxon convenience stores throughout Memphis and Shelby County on Friday, March 13 for another Community Conservation Day. MLGW, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and Exxon On the Run stores will partner to share information on how to conserve and use energy wisely and to give away free energy kits. Drop by for some useful energy tips and energy kits! MLGW will hold smaller, monthly Community Conservation Days each month at its Community Offices beginning in January.



## MLGW Ballot Proposal Passes

Approximately 80 percent of voters approved the proposal on the Nov. 4 ballot restricting any sale of MLGW before voters decide on the sale in a referendum. The official wording of the initiative: "Any proposed sale of Memphis Light Gas & Water or any of its electric, gas and/or water assets shall not be final until first approved by a majority of duly qualified voters in the City of Memphis."

## TVA Rate Decrease for 1st Quarter 2009

TVA recently announced a decrease in its fuel cost adjustment effective Jan. 1, 2009, citing reductions in purchased power and natural gas prices as reasons for the rate adjustment. Residential consumers can expect a decrease ranging from about \$4 to \$8 a month. Because the fuel cost adjustment is a per kilowatt-hour charge, amounts that consumers will save depends on the amount of energy they use.

## Energy Awareness Web Site

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has launched the Stay Warm, Save Money Web site and educational outreach campaign to help consumers be more energy efficient and save on energy costs. Customers can go to [www.energysavers.gov](http://www.energysavers.gov) for more information.



*Community Outreach* is produced by the Communications and Public Relations department of MLGW. If you have questions, concerns, or suggestions about this publication, please feel free to contact the Community Relations area of MLGW's Communications and Public Relations department at (901) 528-4820. Or call Glen Thomas, Supervisor, Communications and Public Relations, at (901) 528-4557. The Community Relations area also assists neighborhood groups and churches with training needs and technical assistance. Address all correspondence to:

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