

# Customer Reference Guide

## Important Utility Information



 **GREAT PLAINS**  
NATURAL GAS CO.  
A Division of Montana-Dakota Utilities Co.  
*In the Community to Serve®*

1-877-267-4764 • [www.gpng.com](http://www.gpng.com)

**Know what's below.  
Call before you dig.**



**It's the Law!**

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## Welcome to Great Plains Natural Gas Co.

We hope this booklet will serve as a valuable reference tool for you. It might be a good idea to keep it handy – should you have questions about our services in the future.

If you have any additional questions, please call us at 1-877-267-4764 and a knowledgeable Great Plains employee will be happy to assist you further.



## About Great Plains Natural Gas Co.



Great Plains Natural Gas Co. (Great Plains) has been committed to providing natural gas to western Minnesota and eastern North Dakota communities since 1966. A lot has changed throughout the years, but one constant has been our commitment to provide our customers with a reliable, safe and clean source of energy for their homes and businesses.

Today, we're a Division of MDU Resources Group, Inc., (NYSE: MDU), an investor-owned company headquartered in Bismarck, North Dakota. Great Plains Natural Gas Co., with its General Office in Fergus Falls and District Office in Marshall, Minnesota, operates as both a local distribution company and a transporter of natural gas to industrial, commercial and residential customers in 18 Minnesota communities and Wahpeton, North Dakota.

Over the years, Great Plains has adopted the slogan "In the Community to Serve," and we believe in those words. Our success as a company is rooted in the growth and prosperity of our communities. We're committed to help meet tomorrow's challenges and opportunities by providing affordable and reliable energy services.

## Natural Gas Customers...

Great Plains is committed to providing safe and reliable natural gas service to our customers. Natural gas is a clean, efficient and safe fuel that adds comfort and ease to your life. It helps heat your home, warm your showers, cook your food, dry your clothes and more. Natural gas is safe when used with proper care; as with any fuel source, it is important to follow proper safety precautions to keep your home safe.

To ensure the safe and efficient use of natural gas in your home, keep all natural gas appliances and equipment clean and properly maintained. Natural gas is a colorless, odorless, and non-toxic substance. For easy detection and your safety, an odorant is added to help you identify a potential natural gas leak. The odor gives off a smell similar to rotten eggs or sulfur. If you smell natural gas in your home, leave your home immediately and call Great Plains at **1-877-267-4764**.

Once a year, we enclose a scratch and sniff insert with your utility bill so you and your family can recognize the odor added to natural gas. If you would like to learn more about natural gas or have questions about its safe use, visit [www.gpng.com](http://www.gpng.com) or call us.



Gas

## How You Buy Energy...

Every time you turn a dial you buy energy. It's our job to bring natural gas to your meters, but you are responsible for how it is used inside your home. By being aware of how you use energy, and by eliminating waste, you may be able to reduce your energy bill.

**Natural Gas:** Your natural gas meter measures the volume of gas you use each billing period. Your bill shows the difference between your meter's present and previous readings in units called "Mcf" (an Mcf is one thousand cubic feet). Since the energy content of an Mcf of natural gas varies slightly throughout our service area, we convert the volume of gas you use to energy units called "decatherms" (a decatherm, or dk, equals one million British Thermal Units of energy). By doing this, we ensure you are billed for the amount of energy you used based on the energy content of natural gas for your locality.

**Meters:** Your natural gas meter measures how much energy you use. Meters are accurate instruments and care must be taken to ensure they are not damaged. Tampering with a utility meter is not only a criminal offense, it is dangerous too.

Energy



Your meter is read about the same date every month. If we are unable to read your meter because of extreme weather conditions, or if the meter is located inside your home and you're not there, we may have to estimate usage on your bill that month. Any difference between our estimate and your actual usage will be corrected automatically the next time your meter is read.

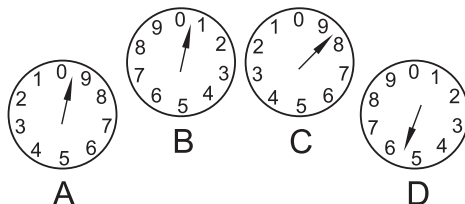
After your meter is read, your bill is calculated according to the rates that have been approved by the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) of Minnesota or the North Dakota Public Service Commission (PSC). Copies of these rates are available by calling 1-877-267-4764 or on-line at [www.gpng.com](http://www.gpng.com). When there is a change in rates, an explanation of the change is included with your utility bill.

**Automated Meter Reading (AMR):** In most parts of the company's service territory, Great Plains has installed meters equipped with AMR technology. This technology allows Great Plains to collect meter read data remotely without having to physically visit and manually read the natural gas meter. The AMR equipped meters record natural gas usage logged by the meter. The meter data is sent from that module to a receiver using a radio frequency communication technology. The AMR system then collects the reads with walk by handheld receivers, mobile receivers or fixed tower collectors. The information collected is then sent to the utility billing system to produce timely and accurate bills.

## How To Read Your Meter...

A meter is used to measure the cubic feet of natural gas you use. Reading a meter is similar to reading a clock. Here's what to do:

Read the number as indicated by the hands on the dials. If a hand is between two numbers, read the small number, except when the hand is between 0 and 9, in which case you read the number 9.



In the illustration, dial A reads 9; dial B reads 0; dial C reads 8; and dial D reads 5. The correct reading of this meter is 9085. The amount of energy you have used is determined by subtracting last month's meter reading from the current reading. If you have questions about how to read your natural gas meter, contact us at 1-877-267-4764.

## Saving Money & Home Safety Tips...

Managing your utility bill begins at home with you. There are several ways to help keep household energy costs down.

**Weatherize your home:** Projects can be as simple as caulking and weather stripping around windows and doors, to a major undertaking like adding attic or wall insulation.

**Change your living habits:** You can also save energy by reducing the temperature setting on your water heater to 120° F., and adjust your winter thermostat temperature down at night. Pull the drapes to minimize heat loss through windows.

**Invest in energy efficient appliances and equipment:** Most appliance dealers and heating and air conditioning contractors sell products that are much more energy efficient than those available just a decade ago. Insist on a high efficiency model and look for the ENERGY STAR® label when you make your next major appliance purchase.

**Conservation Incentives:** Great Plains offers incentives to Minnesota customers who invest in energy conservation efforts. Programs available vary. For more information regarding the programs available visit [www.gpng.com](http://www.gpng.com) or contact us.

**CAUTION:** Great Plains fully supports energy conservation, but we feel it is important to inform you about two dangers that might result from improper energy conservation practices. We don't mean to frighten you – just inform you.

**Hypothermia:** Heating is the major consumer of energy in the home. To conserve energy, some people turn the heat down. This is great for healthy, active people who can just put on a sweater and feel comfortable. But, young children, people confined to a bed or chair due to illness, and the elderly may be in serious danger of accidental hypothermia.

Hypothermia (“hypo” - below, and “thermia” - temperature) is the result of the body not being able to produce enough heat. It is sometimes confused with “hyperthermia” which means abnormally high temperature.

With hypothermia, the body temperature drops. When it drops below 94° F, uncontrollable shivering begins and continues until the body temperature reaches 90° F. Below this temperature, a life-threatening situation is present and, if left untreated, can result in death.

***Here are some symptoms of hypothermia:***

- Skin is pale and waxy. Face may be puffy and swollen.
- Trembling may occur, accompanied by chills, but not always.
- The person may feel warm.
- Speech slows and words become slurred.
- The person becomes forgetful.
- The person becomes very tired.

Since mental confusion is one of the first symptoms, the person is normally not aware of what is happening. **Hypothermia, even in early stages, needs immediate attention!** If you can't reach a doctor, take the person to a hospital immediately.

Remember...everyone is susceptible to hypothermia if the conditions are right. Pay particular attention to those that appear overly tired or cold.

The best solution to hypothermia, of course, is to prevent it from happening. Keep your home warm enough so additional layers of clothing or bedding will prevent the first chill. Your doctor is your best source of additional information on hypothermia.

**Back Drafting:** In our efforts to reduce heating costs, many of us have turned to woodburning fireplaces and stoves as supplementary sources of heat along with natural gas furnaces. It's a good idea, but many homes are often too tight to provide adequate air for the safe operation of open flame heating systems (fireplaces, wood/coal stoves, natural gas furnaces, etc.). We feel that everyone should try to conserve energy, but after you weatherize you may need to add a combustion air source to prevent back drafting.

Fireplaces require a lot of air. If there is not enough air to satisfy the requirements of a fireplace or wood stove as well as a furnace or water heater all burning at the same time, the fireplace draft can pull toxic combustion products from these gas appliances back into the living area. This condition can seriously endanger health. The products of combustion (which may contain carbon monoxide) must be continuously removed while the fireplace or stove is operating. In fact, any device that exhausts air from the home (including kitchen or bathroom exhaust fans) can contribute to the back drafting problem.

**To Check for Back Drafting:** Start a fire in the fireplace on a cold day and after a few minutes, touch the vent pipe of the furnace, water heater, or any space heater. (*Careful, they may be very hot!*) If the vent is cold, your fireplace could be creating a dangerous back draft. Turn down the thermostats and water heater temperature controls, let the fireplace burn down and call a heating contractor.



## Public Awareness...

### Call Before You Dig:

Planning an outdoor home improvement project, planting a tree, digging a hole for a mailbox or installing a fence? Remember to call 811 before you dig two working days prior to any digging. The first step to any project is safety.

Calling 811 before any digging job gets your underground utility lines marked for free and helps prevent undesired consequences. Digging without calling can disrupt service to an entire neighborhood, harm you and those around you, and potentially result in fines and repair costs.

The safest way to prevent damaging an underground service line is to call 811 and have the service lines marked before you dig. But, should you damage your service line, even if only the pipe coating is damaged, call 911 and then call us at **1-877-267-4764** and have someone inspect and repair the damage immediately. Never backfill or cover a damaged line until repairs have been made by Great Plains. **Damaged lines may corrode causing them to leak in the future and possibly harm your family.**

### Buried Gas Line:

If you have a buried gas line to your garage, shop, barbecue grill, gas light or any other location, United States Department of Transportation rules effective on August 14, 1995, apply to you.

Great Plains operates and maintains all gas piping through your gas meter in accordance with Federal Gas Pipeline Safety Regulations. Buried gas lines downstream of the meter are your responsibility and subject to the same inspection and maintenance requirements as similar company-owned lines. That is, they must be monitored for corrosion and leakage. If unsafe conditions are found, buried lines must be repaired or disconnected. Plumbing contractors and heating contractors in your area can provide locating, inspecting, new installation, and repair services on your buried gas lines.

When excavating near buried gas piping, the piping should be located in advance and the excavation around the piping must be done by hand.

Public Awareness



**Keep your Meters Clean:**

Meters are designed to withstand extreme weather conditions, but ice and snow buildup during the winter months can damage natural gas meters and pipes. It is important to inspect your natural gas meter on a regular basis and carefully clear snow and ice away from the meter. When removing snow and ice from the meter remember to not strike the meter with a snow blower, blades or shovel and do not kick your meter to break or clear ice. Remove icicles from overhead eaves and gutters to assure dripping water does not splash and freeze on the meter or vent pipes.

Heavy snows, ice falling from eaves and various other problems can cause meters to snap off customer piping and interrupt service. Snow covering meters may also cause the meter safety equipment to shut off service to your home. If your natural gas service is interrupted, for any reason contact us.

**Access to Meters:**

From time to time, Great Plains will need to access your meter for maintenance. It is important that we have clear access to the meter(s). Dogs are the most hazardous obstacles, but not the only ones. Please avoid hanging ropes and garden hoses around the meter. Trim bushes, shrubs and large flowers so they don't completely cover the meter.



## How to Read Your Utility Bill

- 1. Customer Information** Here you will find the name listed on the account, as well as the service address, where natural gas is delivered.
- 2. New Account Number** This area contains your new account number, the bill date, the amount due, and the date payment is due.
- 3. Account Summary** This area provides a summary of your account: your previous balance, previous payment, current balance, total amount due, and the due date of your next payment. Adjustments, if any will also be shown here.
- 4. Great Plains Natural Gas Contact Information** Use the information here to contact us, to report an emergency and to get answers to all of your billing and customer service questions.
- 5. Charge Detail** This area gives a detailed listing of natural gas utility service charges, including your consumption, the most recent meter reading, days in the billing cycle and the applicable rate schedule. A separate section will be shown for each service.
- 6. Usage History** This graph shows up to a 13 month comparison of your historical natural gas consumption.
- 7. Bill Remittance Stub** Return this portion of the bill to Great Plains Natural Gas with your payment. When mailing your payment, please make sure the address on the remittance stub shows through the window on the return envelope.
- 8. Ways to Pay Your Bill** This section provides information about the various bill payment options available to Great Plains Natural Gas customers.
- 9. Billing Terms & Definitions** Important billing terms and definitions that are useful for understanding your bill can be found in this area.
- 10. New Address or Phone Number** If your contact information has changed, please complete this section and send it to Great Plains Natural Gas with your payment.

If you have questions about your bill, please contact Great Plains Natural Gas at **877-267-4764**. We'd be happy to help you better understand our billing procedures.

## Payment & Billing Options

**Online Account Services:** Save time, trees, postage and gasoline by switching to paperless statements and managing your utility account online. Our online account services will give you the flexibility of reviewing your account information and monitoring your monthly usage history throughout the year. Access your account 24 hours a day for account information, usage history, energy conservation tips and a help center. Make an online payment from your active U.S. checking account. It's an easy and secure way to view and/or pay your bill free of charge online 24/7. To sign up for online account services visit [www.gpng.com](http://www.gpng.com).

**Pay by Bank (Direct Bank Payment):** Our pay by bank program provides the convenience of having your monthly bill paid automatically. Each month your bill will be paid automatically by having Great Plains withdraw your preauthorized payment from your designated financial institution 10 business days following your bill date, which is shown on your bill stub. Your automatic payment will also appear on your monthly bank statement. There is no charge to enroll for this service. To enroll, contact Customer Service at 1-877-267-4764 or complete the Pay by Bank enrollment form located on our website [www.gpng.com](http://www.gpng.com) and return with a voided check.

**Drop Boxes:** Great Plains has several authorized drop box locations throughout its service territory. Do not deposit cash in our payment drop boxes. Paying by personal check or money order is much more secure and makes the possibility of missing payments less likely. Please allow 5 business days for payment processing. Call 1-877-267-4764 or visit [www.gpng.com](http://www.gpng.com) for a listing of drop box locations.

**Mail:** Enclose the lower portion of your bill along with a check or money order in the return envelope included with your billing statement. It is not a good idea to send cash through the mail.

**Western Union® Convenience Pay®:** To pay your Great Plains bill at an area pay station, just take your Great Plains bill to a nearby Western Union Convenience Pay location. Pay your utility bill with cash or check, there is no charge for this service. It typically takes one business day for a payment at a Convenience Pay location to be processed by Great Plains. A receipt will be provided to you to confirm the transaction. Find an up-to-date list of Convenience Pay locations at [www.gpng.com](http://www.gpng.com), or contact Western Union

at **1-800-551-8001**.

### **Western Union® Speedpay® (Credit/Debit Card Payments):**

Payments can be made by phone or online anytime with an electronic transfer from your checking account. Use your Credit card, debit card or electronic check through the Western Union® Speedpay® Bill Payment Service. Western Union® is an independent service provider and charges a fee per transaction. ATM or Debit cards with the "NYCE®", "PULSE®", or "STAR®" logo can be used for payment. Visa®, MasterCard® or Discover® credit cards can be used as well. Payments made after 4 p.m. Central Time will be processed the following business day.

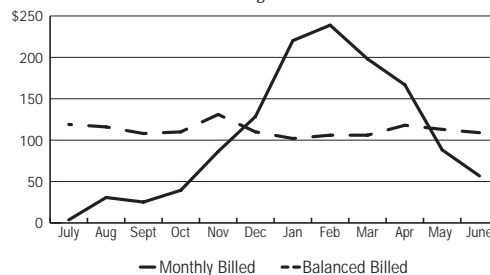
- **Pay by phone:** A credit/debit card payment can be initiated by calling 1-866-364-5829 and following the prompts. Be sure to have your 11-digit account number ready.
- **Online:** Payments can be made online through the Speedpay® website ([www.speedpay.com](http://www.speedpay.com)). Be sure to have your 11-digit account number ready.

**Balanced Billing:** Balanced billing takes the guesswork out of budgeting and levels out your monthly Great Plains bill so you can reduce fluctuations brought on by changes in the weather and price of energy.

With Balanced Billing, your monthly bill is computed by taking an average of your natural gas usage during the previous 12 months. Current energy prices are then applied to this average monthly usage to calculate the current payment due.

Balanced Billing is a free service. To learn more or enroll in this program call 1-877-267-4764 or visit [www.gpng.com](http://www.gpng.com).

**Example:** The following graph is an illustration of how an actual Great Plains' *natural gas* customer's bill looks like on Balanced Billing – and what it would look like without balanced billing.





## Why Your Monthly Bills Vary

There are many reasons why your utility bill may vary from month to month. Here are some examples:

**Weather:** Cold, windy weather forces your furnace to provide more heat to keep your home comfortable. Likewise, hot, humid summers cause your air conditioner to use more energy to cool your home.

**Longer Nights:** Winter months bring shorter days and longer nights, which mean you'll have more indoor activity and use more energy.

**Change in Lifestyle:** House guests, illness, new baby, and so on can mean more showers, more laundry and more cooking. Each increases energy use, even if only for a short time.

**Vacations:** Your home will probably use less energy when you're away. Remember your furnace and other appliances continue to operate (and use energy) while you are gone.

**Appliances:** Adding appliances or appliances that need cleaning or repair usually use more energy.

**Number of Billing Days:** Your billing days may vary. The more days you've used energy, the higher your bill will be. Your utility bill tells you how many days your bill covers.

**Other Services:** You may have incurred a charge for some service, such as a service call from Great Plains. These costs added to your regular charge for energy will increase the total amount of your bill.

## Why is my utility bill different from my neighbor's

**Housing Differences:** The type of construction, size and location of a house have a lot to do with how much energy it uses. A large, well-insulated house protected from the wind may use less heating energy than a small, poorly insulated house exposed to cold winter gusts.

**Differences in Occupancy:** A dwelling's utility costs are also affected by its number of occupants, their ages and living habits. Since preferences in room temperatures, laundering, bathing and cooking styles differ among households, differences can be expected in the amount of energy used.

**Appliances:** The number and size of appliances found in a home and how often they are used can significantly affect energy usage.

**Lifestyle:** People who stay-at-home tend to use more energy than those who are out frequently.

## **What to Do if You Have Trouble Paying**

Great Plains is concerned when customers have difficulty paying their utility bills. If you experience trouble paying your bill on time, call us.

**Payment Arrangements:** Payment arrangements can be made to help get your payments back on schedule. The amount of each payment is based on: the amount of the unpaid balance; the customer's ability to pay; the customer's payment record; and the length of time the bill has been outstanding.

**Energy Assistance:** The federal government provides funding to each state to assist low-income households in paying their energy bills. In some areas, there are also private, charitable funds available for emergency assistance. Great Plains can direct you to the agencies responsible for these programs.

**Weatherization Programs:** Assistance is available through some government agencies to weatherize eligible low-income homes. Adding insulation, caulking and weather stripping are examples of the weatherization measures available at no cost to the homeowner. The added measures not only reduce the home's heating needs, but also improve its comfort.

**Third Party Notice:** Any Great Plains' customer can voluntarily select another person to be notified before utility service is disconnected. This "third party" is selected by the customer and usually is a friend, relative, clergyman or government agency. The third party program is strictly confidential.

The purpose of the third party is to make sure the customer receives and understands the disconnection notice and to help take action to prevent disconnection. Great Plains will start the program after receiving a request from you or another responsible person.

## Connecting & Disconnecting Service...

We strive to make it as convenient as possible for you to start, stop or transfer natural gas service. Here are some tips to make it easier:

- Visit [www.gpng.com](http://www.gpng.com) and select start, stop or transfer services under the Customer Service tab. This will allow you to request service any time that is convenient for you. Online requests require an advance notice of at least two business days.
- Call 1-877-267-4764 and let us know the date you want service to start or stop. Please contact us as far in advance as possible.
- A request to start or stop service may require us to access your home. Arrangements will be made when you contact us.
- Requests to start or stop service during regular working hours are provided at no charge, if this service has not been previously requested in the past year. However, there is a charge if this service is performed outside of regular working hours.
- If you are interested in establishing natural gas service to a home or other building that does not currently have service, contact us at 1-877-267-4764.

## **When You Want to Contact Us...**

Great Plains has a convenient toll-free number. You can rely on knowledgeable employees to answer your questions.

**For all your utility needs including emergencies, call 1-877-267-4764.**

**Customer Service Hours: 7 am to 7 pm, Monday through Friday, email us at [customerservice@gpng.com](mailto:customerservice@gpng.com), or visit our web site at [www.gpng.com](http://www.gpng.com)**

## **When You Want to Contact the...**

### **Public Service Commission/Public Utilities Commission**

Great Plains considers it a privilege to serve you. Serving you quickly and efficiently is important to Great Plains and we encourage you to contact us whenever you have a question or a problem with your utility service.

Your state's Public Utilities Commission regulates Great Plains and is available for consultation on utility matters.

You may call the office in your area.

#### **Minnesota Public Utilities Commission**

**1-800-657-3782**

[www.mn.gov/puc](http://www.mn.gov/puc)

St. Paul, MN

#### **North Dakota Public Service Commission**

**1-877-245-6685**

[www.psc.nd.gov](http://www.psc.nd.gov)

Bismarck, ND





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