

Disconnecting Heat/Power during Winter: A Manitoba Irony

by Gaile Whelen-Enns

This writer has been receiving calls asking for research about Manitoba Hydro disconnecting heat and power for homes in northern Manitoba. These disconnects are going on now. It is worth remembering that in northern Manitoba, and any community without natural gas pipeline, all energy use is electric. So the furnaces are electric.

The Public Utilities Board (PUB), under its Act, can set policy, and deal with appeals when power is cut. And the PUB Act states you cannot disconnect heat in a Manitoba residence between October 1 and May 1. Makes sense, that is the cold time of year.

In 2008 the Public Utilities Board issued a new policy regarding disconnects. But the policy only applies to residences with natural gas heat. It includes using 'limiters' on the meters so that heat continues, and limited

use of electricity continues.

The Public Utilities Board does not have enough authority regarding Manitoba Hydro. No PUB authority regarding hydro capital projects, just hydro rates. An inquiry appointed in the 1970s, reporting to the NDP in the 1980s found Manitoba kept going over budget on capital projects, while causing unacceptable environmental damage. Could an inquiry today access the necessary information?

So the PUB has no authority over disconnects if they are electric power only disconnects, where the furnace is electric. And limiters are not being used in northern Manitoba, based on our research.

Time to adjust policy and the legislation – so that Manitobans in the north who have electric furnaces receive equal treatment during the winter. Then the ban for disconnects between October 1 and May 1 would be in place for everyone. Perhaps this is another Manitoba irony. Certainly the winter disconnects should stop immediately.