

# Comfort & Light

A NEWSLETTER FROM THE INTERFAITH COALITION ON ENERGY

Interfaith Coalition on  
Energy  
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The Archdiocese of  
Philadelphia



The Board of Rabbis of  
Greater Philadelphia



The Metropolitan  
Christian Council of  
Philadelphia



The American Jewish  
Committee Philadelphia  
Chapter

## PECO Miscommunicates on Sales Tax Exemption

Convents & Rectories Are, In Fact, Eligible for Tax Break

PECO Energy's residential customers should not pay PA Sate sales tax on residential accounts. But some residential accounts (Rates R, RH, OP and RT) may be for commercial buildings. Pennsylvania's Department of Revenue asked PECO to find out if residential rates were actually being applied to residents. In February, 1996, PECO Energy sent out a letter and return post card to a particular group of customers. The letters went to every PECO electric customer who had a residential rate but a name that did not seem to be a residential type of name. Of course, every convent and rectory received one of these letters.

The letter said that if you did not return the enclosed post card by March 10, 1996, Pennsylvania State sales tax would be charged starting in April. The card listed three possible categories which could be checked:

- (1) the household was used strictly for residential purposes
- (2) electricity was re-billed to a tenant
- (3) a certain percentage of the household is used for business purposes.

None of these categories really fits a convent or rectory, or even many parsonages which may feel that service to their communities might not qualify as a "strictly residential purpose."

We complained. PECO recognized the error. But that's not going to help you. Check to see if you are now being charged State sales tax on residential electric service. If you are, send a letter certified mail, return receipt requested, to start the procedure for obtaining exemption. ☐

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## HELP THE ELDERLY CHILL OUT

**I**n the summer of 1993, over a hundred elderly people died in Philadelphia's hot weather. Last summer, seven hundred deaths in Chicago were blamed on the heat. *What can be done?*

The Energy Coordinating Agency is working with neighborhood volunteers to show elderly residents how to use minimal cooling energy safely. ECA recruits, trains and mobilizes volunteers to help isolated, low-income, frail, house-bound elderly. The age and income criteria are flexible.

One client, Florence Shenko, said "There is not much you get free today. This is very nice." Existing community groups, like religious congregations served by ICE, are particularly welcome to the ECA program. Some of the Home Energy Safety Measures include checking for carbon monoxide, changing smoke detector batteries, and client education. For more information on this well-defined project, contact ECA's Scott Hunter at (215) 988-0929. He can provide you with a free Home Energy Safety checklist.

Also, whenever a "Heat Emergency" is declared in Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Corporation for Aging sets up a volunteer phone number to field calls from the elderly (215) 765-9040. 

## Two Ways to Save:

### Museum - Quality Treasures Don't Need Strict Climate Control

**S**ome members of congregations believe that lowering the temperature inside the house of worship during the winter will harm valuable artifacts. The Smithsonian Institution in Washington has been proving that this is not so. Their March 1996 magazine described how they have been using three dozen Plexiglass "torture chambers" to simulate horrendous environments for various artifacts, which are more resilient than we have thought.

At least eighty museums and exhibit organizations have requested more detailed information. We did, too, and will share it with you when we receive it. Some organizations have already reported huge savings.

## Turn Off Computers!

**S**ome people believe in the myth that turning off a computer shortens its life.

The Rocky Mountain Institute of Snowmass, CO recommends turning off

your monitor and small laser printers if they will be idle for fifteen minutes or more. They also recommend turning off your whole computer if you are not going to use it for two hours or more.

RMI has researched the subject to report that modern computers are designed for 40,000 on-off cycles before failure. So, if you turn a computer on and off once a day five days per week, you'd find it hard to wear it out. Even turning it on and off ten times each business day won't shorten its life appreciably. And you'll save a lot of kilowatthours in the bargain!

RMI also states that IBM and Hewlett Packard recommend that their employees turn off computers. RMI says they know of studies which indicate that a computer would have to be turned on and off every five minutes to harm a hard drive. ☐

## HOW FAST ARE WE GOING?

You think you are sitting still, but remember that as the earth spins, you are actually rotating at 900 miles per hour in relation to the center of the earth. With our planet revolving around the sun, add 66,700 miles per hour. And as our solar system spirals around our Milky Way Galaxy, let's add another 540,000 miles per hour in relation to the center of our Milky Way galaxy. We ignore the speed of the entire galaxy because we don't know to what to compare it. So, while you are sitting still in meditation or reading this newsletter, you are traveling at more than 600,000 miles per hour. And the cops don't even notice! ☐

## A WHOLE LOT OF BUILDIN' GOIN' ON

**E**ngineering News Record reports that religious construction put in place will be worth an estimated \$3.6 billion in 1996, up 2% from last year. Last year was up 3% from the previous year. The US Census Bureau says that the value of construction of religious buildings has doubled in the past decade.

According to RS Means, a company which estimates construction costs, a new church in Philadelphia cost \$106.17 per square foot, not counting site work, utilities, land and development costs or specialty equipment or special finishes. In 1995, the per square foot construction cost for movie theaters was \$87.24 and single story department stores cost \$59.37 per square foot, about half the cost of a church. ☐

## ARIZONA ICE CHANGES ELECTRIC RATES

On April 24, 1996 the Arizona Corporation Commission (similar to the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission) ordered Arizona Public Service to establish a time of use electric rate.

AZ-ICE submitted electricity data from 70 churches measured for one year starting July 1994. Dan Moore, the head of AZ-ICE, tells us that they used the definition for Religious Houses of Worship that was developed in New Jersey, which we sent to Arizona.

Dan Moore also said that AZ-ICE appreciated our help getting their rates changed. ☐

# — The End of Fossil Fuels —

Many people say that we are running out of fossil fuels. On February 20, 1996 we wrote to more than a dozen nationally-recognized organizations asking their expert opinions about the practical time limit for the domestic availability of natural gas, oil, and coal from the worldwide marketplace.

Greenpeace replied by sending us a membership application. The Environmental Defense Fund referred us to the World Resources Institute. After waiting three months, we received five replies:

We expect our readers to realize that most of these responses came with many caveats and conditions. In addition, we used the arithmetic means of ranges in our averages, which is not at all exact.

None the less, we can draw two conclusions. *First*, most of the people who predict limits to fossil fuels don't share reliable information easily.

*Second*, those who do share it are fairly consistent— no fossil fuels will be financially worth recovering by the year 2400, which means we will have used it all up in about a half a century, uncontrollably polluting our environment in the process.

The Alliance to Save Energy reports in their recent newsletter that American per person energy use decreased 14% between 1978 and 1983. In 1994 we were using 5% less than in 1978, yet since 1983 our per person energy use has been increasing by almost 1% per year. ☐

Years of Availability			
	<i>Oil</i>	<i>Natural Gas</i>	<i>Coal</i>
Congressional Research Service	75	100+	200
EERE Clearinghouse (Rick Campbell)	50	50	2-300
Worldwatch Institute	50-100	100-500	100-500
World Resources Institute	209	45	52
DOE Energy Information Admin.	100	65	200
Averages of opinions	102	112	200

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- Building and Grounds Chairperson
- Congregation President
- Treasurer
- Clergy

