

How much should I be spending on my utility bills?

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How much do you spend per year on electricity and natural gas? How much electricity and natural gas do you consume? How much electricity and natural gas should you consume? For many different reasons, many people today want to consume less energy, but few actually know their energy consumption, and fewer have any idea if they consume too little or too much compared to their neighbor. Well, you're about to find out. Warning – this involves math!

In 2013, the average OPPD residential customer consumed 11,565 kWh/year (approximately \$1,404/year including service fees and taxes), and the four year average (2010-2013) was 11,723 kWh/year (\$1,421/year). What is a kWh? Residential electricity is sold in units of kilowatt hours (kWh), which is the electricity need to provide 1000 watts per second for one hour. So, if a 60 W bulb for a desk lamp was on for an 8 hours per day, that bulb would consume 0.48 kWh (60 watts x 8 hours per day = 480 watt-hours / 1000 = 0.48 kilowatt hour or 0.48 kWh) per work day or 120 kWh per year. At an average cost of \$0.1034/kWh, that one 60W light bulb will cost you \$12.41/per year to turn on for 8 hours/day.

Likewise, natural gas (provided by MUD) is sold in units of therms. One therm is equivalent to 100 cubic feet of natural gas, and when burned, produces 100,000 British Thermal Units (BTU) of heat energy. One BTU is approximately equal to the heat energy produced by a single burning match. Most midtown home furnaces are rated at 100,000 therms. In 2012, the average MUD residential customer consumed 801 therms/year, and the 12 year residential MUD average (2001-2012) was 878 therms/year or \$771/year (including taxes and fees). Even worse, most midtown homes consume 10-30% above average energy due to the older housing stock.

Most Omahans are shocked that they spend, on average, \$2,192/year on energy. Since we pay our utilities monthly, we often ignore the annual cost. But it could be worse. Omaha ranks as the 5th lowest for U.S residential natural gas (2013 Memphis Light Gas and Water Utility Bill Comparison survey) and OPPD retail rates were 16.4% below the national average in 2013.

To determine your annual energy consumption, first obtain copies of your 2013 energy bills. Copies of your OPPD bills can be obtained online (<https://myaccount.oppd.com/myaccount/>) or by phone (402-536-4131). Likewise, copies of your MUD bills can be obtained online (<https://myaccount.mudomaha.com/Welcome.action>) or by phone (402-554-6666). Please note, your MUD bill covers natural gas, water, and sewer charges, so make sure you are only using your natural gas charges. Simply add up your electricity and natural gas consumption for the year and compared your annual energy consumption to the average numbers above to see where you stand.