

THERE'S A BULLY IN TOWN

Few are they who have not known the personal experience of being bullied—someone who can do or say anything they want simply because they are bigger than you are. That is exactly what is happening to your neighborhood heating oil dealers. While the oil dealers and their customers are experiencing ever-increasing energy prices, National Grid has put out an aggressive ad campaign in an effort to get oilheating customers to convert to natural gas. I would like to challenge them to provide proof of their allegations against heating oil to the consuming public.

National Grid knows that they will soon have to go before the Public Utilities Commission to request an enormous rate increase. Natural gas is trading on the market at almost double what it was in May, 2007. They will have to pass that increase onto the consumer. They have recently asked the PUC for a 10% increase to cover a \$9 million deficit and an additional 4.6% on the distribution charge to pay for improvements to their infrastructure. Are they trying to keep it quiet so they can lure unsuspecting oilheat customers to a product that they are led to believe is less expensive and cleaner so that once they switch, it's too late?

Did you know that in Rhode Island, heating oil has been less expensive than natural gas for 19 out of the past 22 years? For many years, the oil industry has been developing new technologies to increase efficiency, reduce our carbon footprint and decrease consumption before it ever became popular to do so. In 1973, the average oil-heated home burned 1,294 gallons a year; today it is 833 gallons, a 35% reduction.

Energy Star oil-fired furnaces are available that are 95% efficient and boilers that are 93% efficient. Upgrading an older system can save up to 40% on fuel costs. By taking small steps with bioheat, a blend of heating oil with vegetable oil or animal fats, oil-heated systems will run even cleaner and reduce our dependence on foreign oil. Just a 5% blend of bioheat is as clean as natural gas for CO² emissions. The oil industry is taking it slowly because it is sensitive to increases in prices for agricultural products, but bio-heat is coming.

Residential heating oil equipment creates such a negligible amount of emissions that heating oil is not even regulated by the Federal Clean Air Act. If natural gas isn't a significant contributor to carbon dioxide emissions, why are the natural gas lobbyists fighting to change the way carbon dioxide emissions will be counted under the climate bill currently on the floor of the US Senate?

Unlike natural gas, heating oil is not explosive, and carbon monoxide poisoning from an oil-heated system is so rare that we do not know of a single instance of it anywhere in Rhode Island as far back as we can remember. Carbon monoxide is toxic; heating oil fumes are not. What natural gas does emit is methane, one of the most harmful greenhouse gases. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, methane emits 23 times the greenhouse gases that CO² does.

In fact, Quincy, MA and other communities are concerned that natural gas (methane) leaks are killing 60- or 70-year-old shade trees. Before the introduction of modern leak-detection equipment, natural gas workers were told to look for dying vegetation as a sign of a low-level gas leak. (*Are Gas Leaks Killing Trees?* Robert Knox, Boston Globe, Dec. 13, 2007)

When the weather gets bitterly cold, the gas company cannot keep up with demand. They tell large users who heat with natural gas that they are shutting them off and to switch to their alternative fuel—oil. If National Grid does not have enough infrastructure and product to supply the customers they have now, how will they supply more? Is this the reason they are pushing for new LNG terminals in our area? Finally, most heating oil dealers are owned by families—some of them second or third generation. They know and care about their customers. They live in the same neighborhoods and give back to the community they share together. When you need them, a full service oil dealer is available 24 hours a day. National Grid cannot say the same.

Is converting to natural gas a smart decision, or do consumers need to do a little research before throwing good money away?

Julie A. Gill
Executive Director
Oil Heat Institute of Rhode Island
(401) 464-8000—phone
(401) 464-9506—fax
julie@ohi.necoxmail.com
www.oilheatinri.com