

## Utilities Frequently Asked Questions

As many of you know, the conservation of utilities continues to be an area of interest for the Department of Defense and the Army. Residents of Fort Carson Family Housing have been receiving mock utility statements since last year from Energy Billing Systems. As reported over the past two years, the Department of the Army has directed that we begin the actual program. Starting on 1 September 2007, all residents of on-post housing will be responsible for any excess utility usage, and will likewise be eligible for rebates from Balfour Beatty if they conserve energy.

To help our on-post Soldiers and families understand how this program works, and to answer any questions you may have, we have compiled the following Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) and answers for the Utility Program:

**You say we're now going to have to pay for utilities. But I can't afford another \$100 or \$150 each month! You're already taking my full BAH – why doesn't the project pay for utilities?**

Actually, you have been paying for utilities for the past few years – it is in your BAH and your rent! Your rent has been established as the same amount as your BAH. BAH includes a utilities component so normal utility use is covered.

**So why do I have to get a bill? If I'm already paying Balfour Beatty Communities for rent and utilities, why don't they just pay the utilities and not bother me?**

The Army, just like millions of citizens and thousands of other organizations, is concerned about conserving natural resources, to include energy. The Army decided the best way to get housing residents concerned and be aware of their utility usage as well is to give them financial incentives to save energy, is to provide them statements showing how much or how little energy they used. Army bases have always known that if there is not a cost for using energy, there is no incentive to save. No responsibility in this case is a bad thing.

**You're changing the way we've always done things on post. That's not good.**

Actually we changed things here at Fort Carson six years ago, and it is good. The reason you live in nice new or renovated homes is that we privatized housing. Housing on post has been running much like outside the gate except for how utilities are treated. Everyone off post is responsible for their own utility bills. Soldiers living downtown pay rent and also utilities out of their BAH. Now we recognize that families on post have responsibility for utility usage as well.

**Why is Balfour Beatty doing this to me?**

Balfour Beatty is concerned that we and our residents use energy responsibly. We incorporated many energy savings features in your home such as the Compact Fluorescent Light bulbs and Energy Star appliances in your home. Congress, the Department of Defense, and the Department of the Army all felt the same way and directed that a way be found to make individuals

responsible for the amount of energy they use. If you do conserve energy you will get a rebate from the amount of rent associated with utilities based upon the house type and construction. If you use an excessive amount, you will have to pay for using it. Many folks will be average users and the change will be invisible to you. *And you may even enjoy a refund!*

**You haven't metered my home yet – how can you bill me for utilities?**

Every home on Fort Carson is metered. We have used modern digital meters that directly read your consumption and report over a phone line. Depending on your home type the gas, electric, and water meters are in different places. Since they're automatic digital meters, they look different than the 60-year old meter technology you may have grown up with.

**Okay – part of the BAH I sent to Balfour Beatty every month is going to go for utilities – but I'm responsible, too. How is that going to work?**

The Army and Balfour Beatty have been collecting data on utility usage by families living in our homes on post for at least three years. We will use this 'history' to calculate a 'baseline' – an average utility consumption – for every kind of house on base. We have 52 different baselines or types of homes. Part of your rent actually goes to pay that baseline. If you use less, then you'll get a refund. (This is a positive incentive to the program, too!) If you use more than the baseline, you will have to pay for it. (This is where you are penalized for not conserving.)

**Is Balfour Beatty really going to give refunds?**

Yes. If everyone uses less than their baseline, we are prepared to issue refund checks to everyone.

**But it's not just refunds, right? Many families are going to have to pay, and that's not fair!**

If you waste energy, you will have to pay. All your fellow soldiers living off post understand this. If you have lived off post you paid your utilities off post and so did your parents. This is not a new thing, just different at Fort Carson. All Army bases are going to do this as well. Remember, what Congress, DoD, and the Army said is that they want Soldiers to help conserve energy. The best way to do that is to reward families who conserve, and to penalize wasteful habits. If you really look at this program it's pretty fair. For example, keeping windows open with the heat on will run up your bill; however, keeping the heat at a low but comfortable level with windows closed will help you conserve.

**How is this payment or refund going to work?**

First of all, to make this as simple as possible for as many families as possible, we are instituting a 5% buffer. If you're within 5% of the baseline, you will owe nothing. Also, if your usage is small (but outside that buffer), we don't want you to have to write small checks. Utilities will be reconciled when the balance reaches \$15. If your usage goes up and down within that \$15 buffer, it may be months until you get a refund or need to make a payment.

**So why is my baseline different from my neighbors?**

There are 5 items that determine your baseline. They are 1) size of home (square feet), 2) number of stories 3) type of construction 4) foundation type (basement, slab on grade, crawl space), and 5) if you are in a multi-unit building, whether you are in an end or an internal unit. We have 52 different baselines on Fort Carson.

**Why is this month's baseline different from last month's?**

The baseline is the average utility usage for all the homes of your type for that month over the last three years. So if all the homes in your baseline averaged 440 KWH of electricity usage in October 2003, 460 in October 2004, and 420 in October 2005, then your baseline will be 440 KWH. Every unit uses different amounts in different months.

**Last winter my baseline was a hundred dollars different from my usage, and I was really trying to conserve!**

Part of the reason we had a mock billing period was so we could make the baseline concept work. We were calculating baselines different last winter. We tried a few different baseline calculations before we arrived at the current method. Everyone agrees that basing your bills on historic usage for the current month is the most fair.

**I heard utility costs are going up a lot this winter. How will that affect the program?**

There's good news for you there. Remember your baseline is just based on how much electricity and gas you used, not how much it cost back then. We always multiply that usage times the current rate, so if the rates go up, your baseline will go up, too.

**I don't think my bill is right. What do I do?** If you think the meter readings are wrong, contact the phone number on your bill (632-9100 x210). They maintain the meters, can answer basic questions about things like the baseline, and have a list of secondary contacts for more detailed questions.

**Can I pay my bill or check my usage online?** Not yet, but we are working on this with EBS.

**I don't like utility billing. Despite all this, I don't think it's fair. I'm moving off post!**

We understand you have a choice on where you live. You signed a lease and will have to discuss what is involved with breaking it or moving off-post. Remember that when you live off-post, you have to pay the full amount for your utilities – your landlord will not give you a baseline credit for your utility usage. And utility rates on Fort Carson are lower than residential rates off-post. You will spend more on gas commuting to and from your off-post home to work, and will have to deal with off-post traffic hassles. You will no longer be close to the commissary, PX, on-post activities, and work. People roaming your neighborhood downtown will not be checked in through a gate, so your family's security may not be as good. If you buy a home off-post, you will not be able to call a work order desk to fix your furnace or replace a broken doorbell – you'll incur the time and

expense of home maintenance yourself. Families have a right to live where they want to, but we hope you consider all the pros and cons before you make any quick decisions based on this utility policy.