

Fuel adjustment clauses explained

By FRANK KELLEY  
Michigan Attorney General

This is a public service article explaining in general terms a provision of Michigan law. Individuals who wish to determine the effect of any law upon their private legal affairs should consult a private attorney.

Despite the continuing debate over the public utilities' fuel adjustment clauses which the legislature approved almost three years ago, there remains some confusion over exactly what they are, how they work and what effect they have on the public.

The fuel adjustment clause is a provision authorized by the Michigan Public Service Commission, which allows gas and electric companies to raise their rates as the price of fuel goes up.

Usually, when a power company wishes to raise the price it charges customers, it must first request permission from the Public Service Commission. A commission decision usually takes about nine months.

Supporters of the fuel adjustment clause argued that this long delay, coupled with rapidly increasing fuel costs, could drive a utility into bankruptcy. To avert it, it is charged, the law permits the utility to charge less for its product than it costs to produce it.

In practice, the fuel adjustment clause has significantly affected the price Michigan residents pay for power. One utility's fuel adjustment increase to its electric customers in fiscal 1973 was \$88 million, or about 12 per cent more than the year before. This translates into an additional \$2.36 to \$2.75 in the monthly bill.

Gas customers of the same company will, as a result of the pass-through of fuel costs permitted by the clause, be paying about \$180 more this year to heat their homes.

Critics of the fuel adjustment clause believe that some utilities have taken advantage of it, citing one instance where a company allegedly charges its customers \$1 for every 75 cents of increased costs. They also claim the clause destroys any incentive for a utility to reduce expenses thus encouraging waste.

A congressional committee recommended earlier this year that fuel adjustment clauses be prohibited. Many states are presently reconsidering laws permitting the clauses and several have already repealed them.

In Michigan, a legislative committee is studying the issue. While several bills have been drafted which would repeal the statute allowing fuel adjustment clauses, none have as yet been formally introduced.

Heart attack victims needed to aid research

If you've suffered a heart attack in the last five years, you could help medical researchers determine whether common aspirin can prevent recurring heart attacks.

Doctors at Henry Ford Hospital are looking for 75 more participants in a nationwide study of the drug's effectiveness. Men and women between the ages of 30-60, who have sustained a documented heart attack no less than eight weeks or more than 10 months before entering the study, are eligible.

An ESTIMATED 1.5 million heart attacks about half of them fatal occur each year in the United States. The aims of the Aspirin Myocardial Infarction Study (AMIS) are to determine whether, and to what extent, regular administration of one gram of aspirin daily over a three-year period will reduce mortality rates and reduce the threat of recurrent heart attacks or stroke.

Dr. Sidney Goldstein of Bloomfield Hills is the AMIS principal investigator and Henry Ford Hospital's cardiovascular disease division head.

He explains that blood clotting plays a major role in both the early and late stages of coronary artery occlusion and that "clumping" is a large component in the formation of blood clots.

These clots in the heart arteries that nourish the heart muscle deprive tissues "downstream" from the obstructed artery of essential nutrients and oxygen—running the risk of extensive damage or destruction.

Aspirin, in small doses inhibits clumping for prolonged periods of time, and it is thought, might be of value in preventing or retarding blockage of the heart arteries.

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