

## Phony furnace inspectors prowling

Consumers Power Co. is warning its natural gas customers in the metro Detroit suburbs to be alert for solicitations from persons claiming to be furnace inspectors.

In recent weeks, the utility has received notice of at least six area incidents involving suspicious circumstances.

"We're warning our customers to be alert to these solicitations and take actions to protect them from a possible scam," said Thomas L. Rugh, communications director for Consumers Power's Metro Region.

"IN THESE incidents, the customer has agreed to have their furnace inspected by a person claiming to be a certified furnace inspector. After the person 'inspects' the furnace, a claim is made that it is not working properly.

"The 'inspector' then calls his 'supervisor' — who happens to be in the near vicinity — for a second opinion. The 'supervisor' agrees with the furnace diagnosis, and the pair proceed with a high-pressure sales pitch to have a new furnace installed that day.

"Customers have been frightened by being told not to call Consumers Power because we would simply turn off the furnace, leaving the customer without heat," said Rugh.

"While we do perform furnace inspections for a fee, only in rare instances do we turn off the furnace, for example, when the furnace is emitting dangerous carbon monoxide fumes," said Rugh.

IF YOU ARE approached by a suspicious person, you should:

- Call the heating inspection unit of your city or township.
- Call a local heating contractor, listed in the Yellow Pages, to verify the claim that the person is a certified inspector. Local heating contractor associations could also verify if the firm exists and its business record.

"All heating inspectors have to be licensed by the state of Michigan and registered in the communities in which they work," said Rugh.

If you suspect a problem with your gas furnace, you can have Consumers Power inspect it for a charge.

Consumers Power serves 630,000 customers in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties.

## Jobless rates up and down

Unemployment rates declined in metro Detroit and four other Michigan labor markets in November, a state official said.

Among 12 major labor market areas, joblessness climbed in five others and remained unchanged in two, according to Richard Simmons Jr., director of the Michigan Employment Security Commission (MESC).

Michigan's statewide seasonally unadjusted jobless rate for November, which the MESC reported in early December, was 8.0 percent, down slightly from October's rate of 8.1 percent. The number of jobless workers remained unchanged at 553,000.

EACH MAJOR area's labor force rose in November. Employment grew in all but one area during the month. The gains were large enough to absorb all or most of the new job-seekers.

The five areas reporting declines in unemployment last month were Battle Creek, Detroit, Flint, Kalamazoo and Lansing-East Lansing.

The Flint area had the largest decline as its rate dropped by nearly two percentage points from 12.2 percent in October to 10.3 percent in November.

Simmons said that callbacks at local automotive plants accounted for the unemployment decline in Flint.

The jobless rates in the Benton Harbor and Grand Rapids areas held steady from October to November at 8.5 and 6.9 percent, respectively.

UNEMPLOYMENT rose in the Ann Arbor, Jackson, Muskegon, Saginaw-Bay-Midland and Upper Peninsula areas in November.

The UP's rate, Michigan's highest, climbed to 11.6 percent from 10.3 percent in October, largely because of seasonal declines in tourism-related employment, Simmons said.

The Ann Arbor area had the lowest rate at 3.9 percent.

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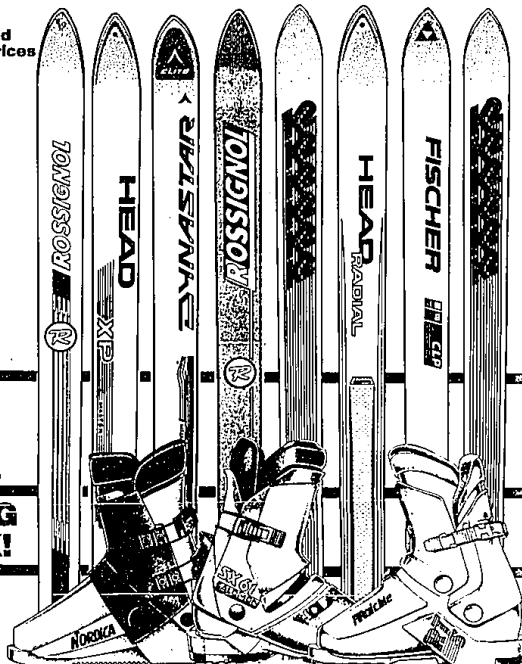
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