

# Bill would limit repairs by utility

By Tim Richard  
staff writer

A group of heating contractors will take its complaint against Consumers Power Co.'s "heating security plan" to the Michigan Legislature, contending it's unfair competition with small business.

"We won't be able to stop it in the immediate future," said Clifford R. McCourt of Day & Night Heating and Cooling in Farmington Hills. "But California, Minnesota and Iowa have passed legislation to stop this activity."

"We have a bill. It hasn't been introduced yet, but we are lining up bipartisan support."

McCourt is spokesman for the Michigan Coalition Against Unfair Utility Practices, headquartered in Troy. Gist of their complaint is that large utilities — like Consumers Power and Michigan Consolidated Gas — fail to charge all the overhead costs of the program; that overhead is charged off against gas revenues; and that uncovered gas customers subsidize the program.

"IT'S NOT TRUE," replied CP spokesman Dan Bishop in the utility's Jackson headquarters.

Everything except "initial but modest startup costs such as printing and mailing" will be charged against the program.

Under the plan, a participating homeowner will pay a flat \$49 for a guarantee that CP will repair covered furnace parts without charge.

The guarantee is good for 24 hours a day, seven days a week, said Bishop. "We fully expect it will be a money maker. The money will be recycled to help keep gas rates lower," he said.

Bishop said CP was given permission by the Michigan Public Service Commission, three-member watchdog over utilities. "It's permissible, legal and appropriate," he added. MichCon and gas utilities in Port Huron and Adrian already have begun the program, Bishop said.

McCourt said, "They would lead you to believe they'll make money and keep rates down."

"We had a conference with Consumers and MichCon, and we're convinced not all the costs are allocated to this program," he said, adding that a professor from Iowa will be asked to uncover the true costs in order to prove a hidden subsidy.

"Contractors who provide this kind of program are losing customers because of the ratepayer-subsidized contracts offered by the utilities," McCourt said. "Once Consumers and MichCon have monopolized the service business, they will be able to control prices in the entire industry."

McCourt said small firms lack name recognition, office space and mailing lists that utilities have. Bishop denied the charge of hurting small business.

"We've committed to independent contractors half the business in the pilot phase of the program," the gas company spokesman said.

## datebook

• **DESIGN CENTER SEMINAR**  
Thursday, Aug. 25 — Last Thursday seminar on "Snidero: the Innovative Kitchen" offered 4-5 p.m. in Troy. Information: Michigan Design Center, 1700 Stutz Drive #25, 48064.

• **SMALL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**  
Saturday, Aug. 27 — Free small business management sampler begins at 10 a.m. at the MSU Management Center, 811 W. Square Lake Road, Troy. Information: 683-2160. Sponsors: Small Business Management Schools, Michigan State University school of business.

• **MICROCOMPUTER CONFERENCE**  
Wednesday, Aug. 31 — Microcomputer conference 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. in Troy. Fee: \$95. Information: 855-2238. Sponsor: Michigan Association of Certified Public Accountants.

• **START A BUSINESS**  
Tuesday, Sept. 6 — "How to Start a Successful Small Business" course begins at 7 p.m. Information: 683-2160. Sponsors: Small Business Management Schools, Michigan State University school of business.

• **FINANCIAL PLANNING PROGRAM**  
Tuesday, Sept. 6 — Free informational seminar on personal financial planning certificate program begins at 7:30 p.m. in Rochester. Information: 370-3120. Sponsor: Oakland University.

• **MANAGE FOR PROFIT**  
Tuesday, Sept. 6 — "Managing for Profit" course begins at 7 p.m. Information: 683-2160. Sponsors: Small Business Management Schools, Michigan State University school of business.

• **ACCOUNTING ASSISTANT**  
Tuesday, Sept. 6 — Free job opportunity seminar on accounting assistant career 7:30-8:30 in Rochester. Information: 370-3120. Sponsor: Oakland University.

• **PARALEGAL OPPORTUNITIES**  
Wednesday, Sept. 7 — Free job opportunity seminar on paralegal career 7:30-8:30 in Rochester. Information: 370-3120. Sponsor: Oakland University.

• **RUN A BUSINESS**  
Thursday, Sept. 8 — "How to Run a Successful Small Business" course begins at 7 p.m. Information: 683-2160. Sponsors: Small Business Management Schools, Michigan State University school of business.

• **GRE PREPARATION**  
Saturday, Sept. 10 through Oct. 1 — Graduate Record Examination preparation workshops offered beginning at 9 a.m. in Rochester. Fee: \$125. Optional math refresher: \$45. Information: 370-3120. Sponsor: Oakland University.

• **GMAT PREPARATION**  
Saturday, Sept. 10 through Oct. 8

— Graduate Management Admissions Test preparation workshops offered beginning at 9 a.m. in Rochester. Fee: \$150. Optional math refresher: \$45. Information: 370-3120. Sponsor: Oakland University.

• **ENTREPRENEUR WORKSHOP**  
Monday, Sept. 12 — "Whole-Brain Entrepreneurship" begins at 7 p.m. in Troy. Fee: \$50. Information: Start A Business Store, 648-8648.

• **LSAT WORKSHOPS**  
Mondays and Wednesdays, Sept. 12-28 — Law School Admission Test preparation workshops offered 6:30-8:30 p.m. in Rochester. Fee: \$185. Information: 370-3120. Sponsor: Oakland University.

• **BIRMINGHAM CHAMBER**  
Tuesday, Sept. 13 — Birmingham Bloomfield Chamber of Commerce meets at 7:30 a.m. in Beverly Hills. Speaker: George Romney. Non-member fee: \$12. Information: 644-1700.

• **ACCOUNTING EXAM**  
Tuesday, Sept. 13 — Waiver examination for the accounting assistant program offered in Rochester. Fee: \$10 per examination. Information: 370-3120. Sponsor: Oakland University.

• **LEGAL ASSISTANT**  
Tuesday, Sept. 13 — Personal Assessment Inventory required for entry into the legal assistant diploma

program offered 7:30-9:30 p.m. in Rochester. Application fee: \$25. Information: 370-3120. Sponsor: Oakland University.

• **ACCOUNTING ASSISTANT**  
Tuesday, Sept. 13 — Examinations to waive introductory accounting courses in accounting assistant diploma program begin at 6:30 p.m. in Rochester. Fee: \$10 per exam. Information: 370-3120. Sponsor: Oakland University.

• **ELECTRONIC TAX RETURNS**  
Thursday, Sept. 15 — The advantages of filing tax returns for individuals and tax preparers will be discussed in seminars offered at 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. at the University of Detroit Renaissance Campus, 651 E. Jefferson, Detroit. Fee: \$10. Information: 927-1501.

• **DESIGNER PREVIEW**  
Thursday, Sept. 15 — Designer Preview XVII offered 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. in Troy. Information: Michigan Design Center, 1700 Stutz Drive #25, 48064.

• **COMPUTERS AND ENGINEERS**  
Friday, Sept. 16 — "Computer Learning in Engineering: Different Perspectives" offered all day in Detroit. Non-member fee: \$150. Information: 1-995-4440. Sponsors: Engineering Society of Detroit, Wayne State University.

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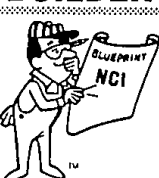
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