

Tips for shopping for power in Maine

BY DARREN FISHELL
BDN STAFF

If you're willing to walk away in a negotiation, that's a sign you've got some leverage.

That's how you should approach competitive electricity offers.

Here are tips we compiled based on advice from the Office of the Maine Public Advocate and interviews of past customers.

Know what you're already paying. Most customers receive what's called the standard offer price, which regulators approve as a default option for customers every year. It's like a blind date

you may not know you've been on. That gets set up annually, starting Jan. 1.

You can call your utility to determine your current rate or find rate comparisons between the standard offer and competitive electricity providers at the "electricity supply" page of the Maine Public Advocate's website.

Understand what the CEP is offering — not just price. Competitive providers can offer plans that change every month, called variable rates. The public advocate's office advises avoiding those plans and making sure that contracts don't eventually roll over

into variable rates. So, make sure to ask not only whether the plan is variable or fixed, but also when the contract ends and what happens when it does.

Find out if there's a termination fee. Some companies charge a fee for getting out of a fixed-term contract early. Ask about such fees and the amount. You can get out of a variable rate at any time, for a \$5 fee, by calling your utility and asking to be switched back to the standard offer.

If you have buyer's remorse, you have five days to back out. Competitive electricity providers are required to send customers

their terms of service before officially signing them up. Those can come by mail, by email or be presented on a company's website. Customers have five calendar days after receiving those terms to back out of a contract, either through verbal or written notification. Customers who get terms by mail have eight calendar days to exercise that right.

The Maine Public Advocate's Office answers inquiries at opa@maine.gov and 207-287-2445. The Maine Public Utilities Commission's consumer assistance hotline is at 624-3687.

How we calculated premium customers paid

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Electricity suppliers report their revenue and total megawatt-hours of power sold to different customer classes for the year. They submit it to the U.S. Energy Information Administration on a document called a Form 861.

That data formed the basis of our cost comparison. It includes competitive suppliers that charge at variable rates and big utilities charging the default standard offer price.

The reporting is not comprehensive; it includes only the largest power generators each year. Gulf Electricity, for instance, did not report in 2013 or 2014 because it didn't produce enough power to meet the reporting threshold. But it did in 2015.

Still, by our estimates, the EIA

reports covered approximately 90 percent of customers in Maine between 2012 and 2014, based on a comparison with monthly state data on competitive supply customers.

The Form 861 data provides the most comprehensive look at how the state's largest competitive suppliers compared on price.

We identified two groups of electric generators selling to Maine homeowners: those that won the state standard offer bid and those that marketed and sold electricity directly to residential customers.

For each group, we calculated an annual average cost of electricity by dividing residential electricity sales by the megawatt-hours sold. Using those numbers, we projected the difference if customers had all bought power at the standard offer rate.

For each year, we multiplied the price difference per megawatt-hour by the number of megawatts sold by competitive suppliers. In 2012, that number reflected savings for customers. In 2013 and 2014, it reflected customers spending more.

We asked the Maine Office of the Public Advocate, Connecticut Office of Consumer Counsel, the Retail Energy Supply Association and the founders of Electricity Maine to review our key findings.

Tim Schneider, Maine's Public Advocate, said the disparity aligned with pricing information his office has tracked monthly and anecdotal information gathered from consumer complaints. Consumer advocates in Connecticut said while they could not weigh in on the BDN's use of EIA data, our findings aligned with their reports.

Market Review

Consolidated Stocks							Indexes										Currencies									
	Close	Chg	Div		Close	Chg	Div		52-Wk High	52-Wk Low	Close	Chg	Chg%	Wk	Mo	Qtr	1 Yr. Chg%		Last	Chg	Qtr	Year				
3M Co	180.81	+0.83	4.4	Kohls	43.53	-0.39	2.0	Dow Jones indus.	18668	15451	18491.96	+72.66	+0.39	▲	▲	▲	+12.93	Euro	0.897	+0.004	+0.017	-0.002				
ABB Ltd	22.21	+0.14	0.8	LillyEli	76.85	-0.38	2.0	Dow Jones Transport	8358	6403	7946.79	+29.23	+0.37	▲	▲	▲	+0.96	British Pound	0.752	-0.002	+0.063	+0.097				
AbtVie	64.12	-0.09	2.3	Loews	41.63	+0.32	0.3	Dow Jones Utility	724	540	673.11	+8.36	+1.26	▲	▼	▲	+22.33	Canadian Dollar	1.300	-0.010	+0.007	-0.017				
AbtLab	42.09	-0.21	1.0	Lowes	76.96	+0.52	1.4	Nasdaq composite	5276	4210	5249.90	+22.69	+0.43	▲	▲	▲	+10.91	Japanese Yen	103.99	+0.750	-2.520	-16.070				
AEP	65.24	+0.83	2.2	McDnlds	115.83	+0.43	3.6	NYSE AMEX composite	2465	1869	2451.70	+61.15	+2.56	▲	▲	▲	+12.61	Mexican Peso	18.580	-0.168	-0.003	+1.780				
Aerfa	116.73	+0.57	1.0	Merck	62.98	+0.08	1.8	NYSE composite	10892	8938	10856.91	+84.98	+0.79	▲	▲	▲	+8.04	Swiss Franc	0.981	unch.	+0.005	+0.008				
AFLAC	73.99	+0.12	1.6	MetLife	43.26	+0.20	1.6	S&P 500	2194	1810	2179.98	+9.12	+0.42	▲	▲	▲	+11.73	Israeli Shekel	3.763	-0.010	-0.077	-0.161				
AK Steel	4.35	-0.05	0.0	Microsoft	57.67	+0.08	1.4	S&P Mid cap 400	1579	1215	1578.68	+15.10	+0.97	▲	▲	▲	+12.50	Norwegian Krone	8.315	-0.021	+0.139	+0.038				
Allstate	68.95	-0.29	1.3	Monsanto	107.44	+0.53	2.2	Wilshire 5000	22785	18462	22686.70	+123.23	+0.55	▲	▲	▲	+10.18	South African Rand	14.485	-0.139	-0.603	+0.936				
Altria	66.88	+0.56	2.4	MorgStan	31.89	-0.02	0.8	Russell 2000	1252	943	1251.83	+12.03	+0.97	▲	▲	▲	+9.32	Commodities								
AMovill	11.81	-0.01	0.3	NewellRub	53.57	+0.35	0.8	Local Stocks																		
Anadarko	56.49	+2.95	0.2	NextEraEn	123.13	+2.13	3.5		52Wk Hi	52Wk Lo	Close	Chg	Chg%	Wk	Mo	Qtr	YTD%	P/E	Div		Units	Date	Close	Chg		
Apache	51.29	+1.50	1.0	NipponTT	45.31	+0.83		Bank of America (BAC)	18.09	10.99	16.00	+0.02	+0.13	▲	▲	▲	-4.93	13.9	0.3	Crude oil NYM	\$/Barrel	Oct	44.44	+1.28		
AplidMatl	30.02	-0.27	0.4	NokiaCp	5.76	+0.10	0.3	Bar Harbor (BHB)	37.69	29.59	36.90	+0.09	+0.24	▲	▲	▲	...	13.9	1.1	Natural gas NYM	Mil. BTU	Oct	2.79	unch.		
Apple	107.73	+1.00		NorthropG	213.24	+1.41	3.6	Camden Nat'l (CAC)	47.49	37.23	46.38	+0.18	+0.39	▲	▲	▲	+5.19	16.5	1.2	Heating oil NYM	Gallon	Oct	1.41	+0.03		
AT&T Inc	40.91	+0.01	1.9	OneokPtrs	39.29	+0.30	3.2	Cisco (CSCO)	31.83	22.46	31.83	+0.25	+0.79	▲	▲	▲	+17.22	15.0	1.0	Gasoline NYM	Gallon	Oct	1.30	+0.03		
Autodesk	68.01	+0.64	0.0	Oracle	41.25	+0.09	0.6	Domtar (IFS)	42.95	29.88	38.29	+0.39	+1.03	▲	▲	▲	+3.63	26.5	1.7	Metals						
AviatTch	9.12	+0.08	0.0	Orange	15.30	+0.26	0.7	Dover (DOV)	74.90	50.91	72.75	+0.21	+0.29	▼	▲	▲	+18.66	21.0	1.8	Gold CMX	\$/toz.	Sep	1322.10	+9.90		
BcoSantSA	4.56	-0.04	0.2	Penn Gnmg	14.12	-0.02		Fairchild SC (FCS)	21.71	12.95	19.91	▲	▲	▲	-3.86	360.5		Silver CMX	\$/toz.	Sep	19.28	+0.42		
BestBuy	38.75	+0.21	1.1	Pennney	9.49	+0.05	0.0	General Dynamics (GD)	153.81	121.61	153.81	+0.97	+0.63	▲	▲	▲	+11.98	16.2	3.0	HG Copper CMX	\$/Lb.	Sep	2.07	unch.		
BKVMel	41.65	-0.18	0.8	PepsCo	107.87	+0.58	3.0	General Electric (GE)	33.00	23.85	31.29	+0.09	+0.29	▲	▼	▲	+0.45	29.5	0.9	Platinum NYM	\$/toz.	Oct	1062.20	+13.30		
BkoAm	16.00	-0.02	0.3	Pfizer	34.77	+0.09	1.2	HCA Holdings (HCA)	88.46	60.07	76.51	+1.35	+1.80	▲	▼	▼	+13.13	13.0		Agricultural						
Boeing	131.16	+1.26	4.4	PhilipMor	101.77	+1.15	4.1	Idexx Labs (IDXX)	114.09	63.48	114.09	-0.93	+0.82	▲	▲	▲	+56.46	51.2		Soybean CBT	c/5000 BSL	Sep	968.50	+9.50		
BP PLC	34.50	+0.84	2.4	PPL	35.03	+0.59	1.5	ImmuCell (ICCC)	8.29	5.60	7.26	-0.02	-0.27	▼	▲	▲	-3.71	20.8		Corn CBT	c/5000 BSL	Sep	316.50	+5.50		
BridfAs	34.33	+0.51	0.5	Praxair	123.44	+0.59	3.0	International Paper (IP)	49.70	32.50	49.12	+0.41	+0.84	▲	▲	▲	+30.29	26.1	1.8	Wheat CBT	c/5000 BSL	Sep	373.25	+5.00		
BrklySq	56.35	-0.41	1.5	ProctGam	88.20	-0.11	2.7	KeyCorp (KEY)	14.01	9.88	12.55	+0.11	+0.88	▲	▲	▲	-4.85	12.7		Live cattle CMEc/4000 Lbs	Oct	101.60	-1.98			
Caterpillar	81.69	+0.24	3.1	PrudEntl	37.58	+1.00	1.4	Kimberly-Clark (KMB)	138.87	103.04	128.82	+0.70	+0.55	▲	▼	▼	+1.19	23.8	3.7	Treasuries						
CBS B	52.22	-0.18	0.7	QstDiag	83.04	+0.68	1.6	Kraft Heinz (KHC)	90.49	68.18	89.61	+0.13	+0.15	▲	▲	▲	+23.16	66.9	2.4		Yield	Chg.	Yr.Chg	Wk	Mo	Qtr
CaterS	22.63	+0.19	1.0	Rayonier	27.90	+0.26	1.0	Lake Sunapee Bank (LSBG)	18.89	13.25	17.95	▲	▲	▲	+27.94	16.6	0.6	3-month T-bill	0.32	-0.01	0.02	▲	▲	▲
CenterPnt	100.93	+0.72	4.3	Raytheon	140.13	+0.17	2.9	Northeast Bancorp (NBNI)	11.72	9.56	11.42	+0.03	+0.26	▲	▲	▲	+8.76	14.1	0.0	6-month T-bill	0.45	-0.01	0.23	▼	▲	▲
Citigroup	47.51	+0.15		RaynAmer	50.69	+0.94	1.8	People's United Fin (PBCT)	16.93	13.62	16.33	+0.15	+0.93	▲	▲	▲	+1.11	18.1	0.7	52-wk T-bill	0.58	0.00	0.33	▼	▲	▲
CocaCola	43.66	+0.31	1.4	RyCarb	70.01	-2.70	1.5	PNC (PNC)	97.50	77.40	90.54	+0.55	+0.61	▲	▲	▲	-5.00	12.3	2.2	2-year T-note	0.79	0.01	0.69	▼	▲	▲
Corning	22.77	+0.06	0.5	Schwab	31.27	+0.29	0.3	Suppi Limited (SPFJV)	5.13	2.67	4.81	▼	▲	▲	0.0	5-year T-note	1.20	0.02	1.48	▼	▲	▲
Deere	84.05	+0.50	2.4	SearsHldgs	13.33	-0.16	0.0	State Street (STT)	75.40	50.60	70.63	+0.51	+0.73	▲	▲	▲	+6.43	14.3		10-year T-note	1.61	0.04	2.16	▼	▲	▲
Disney	94.42	+0.16	1.4	Sherwin	286.43	+1.16	3.4	Sysco (SYS)	53.97	38.34	53.24	+1.18	+2.27	▲	▲	▲	+29.85	31.7	1.2	30-year T-bond	2.28	0.05	2.94	▼	▼	▼
DowChem	51.18	+0.38	1.8	SiderurNac	2.91	+0.24	0.1	The First Bancorp (FNLC)	23.37	17.37	22.85	+0.10	+0.44	▲	▲	▲	+11.63	14.4	0.9	Global Markets						
DukeEngr	80.24	+0.91	3.4	Siemens	118.71	...		United Technologies (UTX)	109.83	83.39	106.93	+0.21	+0.20	▼	▲	▲	+11.30	24.1	2.6		Close	Chg	%Chg	%Yr		
DuPont	43.09	+0.87	1.9	SonyCp	32.64	+0.50		Unum Group (UNUM)	37.26	23.99	35.42	+0.15	+0.43	▲	▲	▼	+6.40	9.7	0.8	FTSE 100	6894.60	+148.63	+2.20	+11.31		
ExxonMbl	87.42	+0.58	3.0	Starbucks	56.18	-0.13	0.8	Verizon Comm (VZ)	56.95	42.20	52.88	+0.32	+0.61	▲	▼	▲	+14.41	14.9	2.3	CAC 40	4542.17	+102.50	+2.31	-2.40		
Facebook	126.51	+0.34		SvstJrnl	36.89	+0.30	0.4	Verso (VRS)	13.60	5.55	7.09	+0.68	+10.61	▲	▼	▼	...	0.0		Nikkei 225	16925.68	-1.16	-0.01	-6.91		
FedExCP	105.49	+0.15	1.6	Symantec	24.28	+0.13	0.3	Walmart (WMT)	75.19	56.30	72.50	-0.34	-0.47	▲	▼	▲	+18.27	15.7	2.0	Hang Seng	23266.70	+104.36	+0.45	+11.14		
FidNFin	37.51	+0.10	0.8	Taxtron	70.81	+0.23	0.4	Most Active												SET	1521.48	-18.23	-1.18	+9.97		
FidNatInfo	80.44	+0.80	1.0	Textnet	41.12	+0.31	0.1		Close	Chg	YTD%	Volume							All Ord	5470.57	-40.63	-0.74	+8.36			
FrontierCm	4.56	-0.02	0.4	Toyota	122.08	+1.06	3.6	Bank of Ameri (BAC)	16.00	+0.02	+0.1	1007451							DAX	10683.82	+149.51	+1.42	+3.55			
GenElec	31.29	+0.09	0.9	Travelers	118.84	+0.49	2.7	Chesapeake En (CHK)	6.60	+0.35	+5.6	459698														
GlaxoSKin	44.26	+1.28	2.2	UPS B	104.59	+0.09	3.1	Bristol-Myers (BMY)	56.35	-0.41	-0.7	339941														
GoldmanS	169.18	+0.67	2.6	ValeroE	54.83	+0.54	2.4	Johnson Contr (JCI)	45.45	+0.41	+0.															