



## **About ACCES**

The American Coalition of Competitive Energy Suppliers (ACCES) is a group of competitive retail natural gas and electricity suppliers committed to consumer education and media outreach, in order to help consumers better understand and take advantage of the benefits of energy choice.

Members of ACCES include Great Eastern Energy, IGS Energy, Infinite Energy, Santanna Energy Services, SouthStar Energy Services LLC, U.S. Gas & Electric, and WGL Energy Services.

You have choices in many important areas of your life – everything from groceries to gasoline, from cars to cell phones. But did you know that in many states you have a choice about who supplies the energy that powers, heats, and cools your home or business?

You probably are familiar with the local utility companies that *deliver* your electricity and natural gas – but there are also companies that compete to *supply* you with this energy. Just like you might choose to purchase the latest smartphone from among a variety of different providers, but have it shipped to you by the U.S. Postal Service, in many places you can choose the company that procures electricity and natural gas on your behalf, and have the utility deliver it to your home or business.

The first step is to learn if choice is available in your state and utility territory. It goes by different names – access, competition, retail choice, restructuring – but the intention is the same: to put the power over your energy decisions in your hands. Check out our [Restructuring by State] page to learn if choice is available to you.

To learn more about the power of choice, and how to choose, spend some time looking at the resources on our website at [www.CompetitiveEnergy.org](http://www.CompetitiveEnergy.org).

## **ACCES Members**

### **About Great Eastern Energy**

[www.GreatEasternEnergy.com](http://www.GreatEasternEnergy.com)

Great Eastern Energy provides custom energy procurement and management solutions, tailored to each client. The Great Eastern team of energy experts works closely with leaders in the industry to ensure thorough, holistic recommendations for managing energy, expenditures, renewable sources, and risk—all of which, when diligently combined, secure long-term profitability and sustainability for clients.

### **About IGS Energy**

[www.IGSEnergy.com](http://www.IGSEnergy.com)

Founded in 1989, IGS Energy is one of America's largest independent energy suppliers, and a leading advocate for change in the energy industry, committed to efforts that will improve the way consumers and businesses view and use their energy resources. Today IGS Energy serves nearly one million residential, commercial and industrial customers across the United States. IGS Energy built its business on one simple idea: customers should be able to choose the energy options that best meet their needs. IGS Energy is recognized in the industry for its energy expertise and for pioneering simple, clear customer solutions that continuously improve the way energy is delivered.

### **About Infinite Energy**

[www.InfiniteEnergy.com](http://www.InfiniteEnergy.com)

Infinite Energy is an innovative supplier of retail and wholesale energy that provides natural gas and electricity in Texas and natural gas in Florida, Georgia, New York and New Jersey. Established in 1994, Infinite Energy has grown into one of Florida's largest privately owned companies and was recognized as one of the 100 Best Companies to Work for in Florida in 2009, 2010 and 2011. Infinite Energy serves all customers, from residential to commercial to industrial.

### **About Santanna Energy Services**

[www.Santannaenergyservices.com](http://www.Santannaenergyservices.com)

Santanna Energy Services is an energy marketing company that serves thousands of commercial, industrial, institutional, small business and residential customers. For over 25 years, Santanna Energy Services has delivered Premium Service and Competitive Prices. Santanna offers personalized expertise required to manage all of your electric and natural gas needs. We realize there are many choices when it comes to choosing energy companies and want to thank you for visiting our website.

### **About SouthStar Energy Services**

[www.SouthStarEnergy.com](http://www.SouthStarEnergy.com)

SouthStar Energy Services has provided economical and reliable natural gas service to consumers for more than 15 years. SouthStar offers customers transportation and supply services, a variety of pricing and contract options, asset management services, risk management and financial services, and a number of value-added offerings. Headquartered in Atlanta, SouthStar serves over half a million residential, small business, large commercial and industrial customers in multiple states. The company's other trade names include: Georgia Natural Gas, Piedmont Energy, Florida Natural Gas, Ohio Natural Gas, New York Natural Gas, or Maryland Energy.

### **About U.S. Gas & Electric, Inc. ("USG&E")**

[www.USGandE.com](http://www.USGandE.com)

USG&E is a retail energy marketer of natural gas and/or electricity to residential and small commercial customers in Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. USG&E is one of the fastest growing private energy marketers in the United States (ranked number 2 by Inc. Magazine in 2010) and is planning the following market entries in the next 12 months: Natural Gas: Kentucky, and Illinois; Electricity: Michigan and Ohio.

### **About WGL Energy Services**

[www.wglenergy.com](http://www.wglenergy.com)

WGL Energy is an entity that delivers a full ecosystem of energy offerings including natural gas, electricity, green power, carbon reduction, distributed generation and energy efficiency provided by WGL Energy Services, Inc. (formerly Washington Gas Energy Services, Inc.) and WGL Energy Systems, Inc. (formerly Washington Gas Energy Systems, Inc.).

## **WHAT IS CHOICE?**

Energy Choice is a consumer-centric program offered in a growing number of areas across the country where electricity and natural gas competition is encouraged. Traditionally, electric and natural gas consumers did not have a choice as to who supplied their energy; the utility that served the region in which the consumer resided served all within that territory. Today, however, energy choice programs allow eligible customers to shop around and choose an electric/natural gas supplier that best suits their needs. That supplier may be the utility, or one of the many suppliers licensed to market in the consumer's area.

At this point, you may be wondering what the difference is between a utility and a supplier. In areas where competition is allowed, the utility is primarily a "poles, wires, and pipes" company, meaning that they are responsible for maintaining and repairing to infrastructure, delivering electricity and natural gas to consumers, and ensuring reliability. A supplier, on the other hand, is a company that sells the energy that the utility delivers. Suppliers compete in an open marketplace by offering a variety of services and incentives, and consumers choose those that most appeal to them and best meet their energy needs.

### **Evolution of Choice**

Since Thomas Edison first developed commercially-viable electrical power in the early 1880s, utilities provided energy to consumers under the regulation of the federal government and public utility commissions. In 1978, however, the U.S. Congress passed the Public Utility Regulatory Policies Act, which allowed non-utility companies to generate and sell electricity on the wholesale power market to utilities, and the Natural Gas Policy Act, which began to lift controls on the price of natural gas drilled from wells. During the 1980s and early 1990s, the federal government took further steps to restructure wholesale markets and reform access to electricity transmission lines and interstate natural gas pipelines.

In order to bring choice directly to you, the consumer, however, states had to take the next step. Beginning in the mid-1990s, many states began to allow non-utility companies (today's competitive energy suppliers) to offer energy directly to consumers, while continuing to use the utilities' pipes and wires to deliver that energy.

State and federal policymakers had two major goals in restructuring energy markets after decades of regulated rates: first, to give consumers control over their own energy decisions; and second, to encourage competition and innovation in the energy sector.

Today, many states have continued to reform and strengthen competitive energy markets in order to put the power of energy choice in your hands.

## **MYTHS v. FACTS**

*MYTH: If I choose to purchase energy supply from a competitive energy supplier, my local utility won't respond to my energy emergencies, like power outages or natural gas leaks.*

**FACT:** If you choose a competitive energy supplier, it is important to remember that the local utility will continue to be responsible for the reliable delivery of electricity and natural gas to the your home or business, and that the local utility will continue to respond to all service interruptions and emergencies.

*MYTH: I've always liked my utility, and if I switch to a competitive energy supplier I will hurt them by taking business away.*

**FACT:** Utilities are regulated by state government (typically through public utility commissions), and their rates are controlled. Typically, utilities' profits come from the *delivery* of your energy (known as "transmission and distribution"), not from the *supply* of energy. Switching to a competitive supplier will not harm your utility.

*MYTH: I can switch to ANY competitive energy supplier and save a lot of money!*

**FACT:** Many suppliers do offer rates that are lower than the standard utility price. But energy choice is not solely about lower prices – in an open market, retail electricity suppliers can offer customers different products and services to meet individual energy needs, such as fixed or variable prices, renewable energy options, time-of-use rates, energy efficiency audits, and other value-added benefits. For some of these products, the rates may be higher, but what's important is the *value* you get for your money.

*MYTH: I have to choose a competitive energy supplier or I won't get electricity or natural gas delivered to my home or business.*

**FACT:** If you choose to not switch to a competitive supplier, the utility will continue to deliver AND supply your energy. Remember, whatever you decide, you are making a choice – so it is worth your time to investigate all your options before making a decision.

*MYTH: If I switch to a competitive energy supplier, my bill will keep going up every month!*

**FACT:** Energy is a commodity – the price can change daily, even hourly, based on many different factors. This is true whether your supply comes from a competitive firm or a utility. The price that the utility or suppliers pass on to you, however, is more stable, and typically changes on a monthly basis. This means the price can go DOWN as well as up! If you would prefer more certainty, many suppliers offer partially or fully fixed price plans, in which your price is guaranteed. This is just another option available to consumers in an open market.

**MYTHS v. FACTS**  
**(continued)**

*MYTH: If I switch to a competitive energy supplier, I will have to pay two bills a month, instead of just one – it will be a major headache.*

**FACT:** In many states that have energy choice, customers can choose “consolidated billing,” in which their supply charges and delivery charges appear on a single bill. Depending on the state, this bill may come from either the supplier or the utility, but either way, you get one piece of paper and have to make just one payment. If you prefer two separate bills, in many states this is an option available to you as well.

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **Q1. What is energy choice?**

A1. For decades, consumers were required to purchase all of their electricity and natural gas from a single utility. Today, a growing number of states are creating the option for consumers to choose if they would like to purchase their electricity or natural gas from a **competitive energy supplier** or from their local utility. Competitive suppliers are typically licensed by your state's public utility commission (sometimes called public service commission). Visit our website at [www.ComeptitiveEnergy.org](http://www.ComeptitiveEnergy.org) to find out if choice is available in your state.

### **Q2. What is a competitive energy supplier?**

A2. A competitive energy supplier is a company that provides electricity or natural gas supply.

### **Q3. Do I have to choose a competitive energy supplier?**

A3. No – in most states with energy choice programs, you do not have to choose a supplier. You may choose to remain with your utility for your electricity and natural gas supply. In some states, like parts of Texas and Georgia, if you do not choose a supplier on your own, you will be assigned to a supplier.

### **Q4. Who will deliver my electricity or natural gas if I select a competitive supplier?**

A4. Regardless who you buy your energy supply from, your utility will continue to deliver electricity and natural gas to your home. Your utility will respond to service interruptions and continue to maintain the poles, wires, and pipes that distribute electricity and natural gas to your home or business. You will continue to receive the same service you are used to with your utility, regardless of where you purchase your energy supply.

### **Q5. Can I save money by choosing a competitive energy supplier?**

A5. You may be able to save money, but not always. Many consumers are interested in switching to a competitive supplier for other reasons, too. They may be interested in purchasing renewable energy, or in special pricing terms (like long-term contracts), different billing and payment options, or home energy equipment services. If energy savings are offered to you, make sure you understand the specific terms and conditions under which you will save money.

### **Q6. Why should I shop for a competitive energy supplier?**

A6. The choice is all yours. Just as you shop for any household item or service, you may shop for your electricity and natural gas to find the best deal and service to meet your needs.

**Q7. Where can I find a list of competitive energy suppliers?**

A7. Some states have developed websites with lists of licensed competitive suppliers, which let you browse for active offers in your area. Visit our website at [www.ComeptitiveEnergy.org](http://www.ComeptitiveEnergy.org) for links to states lists of approved energy suppliers in your state.

**Q8. If I choose a new competitive energy supplier, what part of my service will change?**

A8. When you shop for a competitive energy supplier, you are choosing the company that *supplies* your electricity or natural gas. Your local utility will continue to *deliver* the energy to your home over its pipes and wires. The competitive supplier may own electricity generating plants or natural gas wells themselves, or may purchase the energy from other companies. Either way, they will arrange to have the energy brought to your local utility, who then delivers the energy to your address. The utility will continue to play that important role.

**Q9. Can everyone shop for a competitive energy supplier?**

A9. Not yet. Energy choice doesn't exist in every state. Visit our website at [www.ComeptitiveEnergy.org](http://www.ComeptitiveEnergy.org) to find out if choice is available to you.

**Q10. How do I know that a competitive energy supplier is reliable?**

A10. Competitive energy suppliers must be licensed by the public utility commission or public service commission of the state in which they operate. If you choose a new competitive energy supplier, your utility will continue to deliver your electricity and natural gas as always. You can always contact your state public utility commission or public service commission or your state's consumer advocate office.

**Q11. What will happen if my competitive supplier goes out of business?**

A11. If for some reason your competitive supplier goes out of business, your energy will be provided by the regulated utility or default service provider approved by the state. You could then choose to remain with your utility or provider-of-last-resort, or select another competitive energy supplier. There will be no loss of electricity or natural gas service.

**Q12. Where can I find information on competitive energy supplier prices?**

A12. To find out pricing – and what is included in a supplier's price – contact the supplier directly, or search for information about available offers on select states' shopping websites. Links to state websites can be accessed through our website at [www.CompetitiveEnergy.org](http://www.CompetitiveEnergy.org).

**Q13. How long will a switch to a new competitive energy supplier take?**

A13. Your switch date depends on a number of factors, including the date of your next meter reading. This may take anywhere from two to six weeks, depending on your utility. It may take one to two billing cycles to receive your first bill from your new competitive energy supplier.

**Q14. Will I receive two bills if I choose a new competitive energy supplier?**

A14. Depending on the supplier you choose, you may be able to receive a single monthly bill from your utility that details the competitive energy supplier's charges separately. Some suppliers may also bill you separately. In this case, you would receive two bills, one from your utility for energy delivery, and one from the supplier for the energy supply. Before entering into any agreement, be sure to ask the competitive energy supplier for the available billing options.

**Q15. Are there any charges or fees for choosing a competitive energy supplier or canceling a contract?**

A15. When choosing an energy supplier, you will be required to enter into a contract (in writing, over the phone, or online). Make sure you understand the terms, conditions, length of contract and any fees that may apply at any time during the contract, including if you choose to terminate the contract.

**Q16. Will I still be able to take advantage of "budget billing?"**

A16. Budget billing allows you to pay a fixed amount each month. Budget billing averages bills out over 12 months, so each monthly bill will be the same amount until the total bill is paid. The company may adjust the bill throughout the year, up or down, depending on your electricity or natural gas usage.

You may still be able to take advantage of budget billing from your utility for the delivery of your energy. Many competitive energy suppliers offer budget billing, but they aren't required to do so. Contact your supplier to inquire about its ability to offer budget billing. If you are already on budget billing with your utility, your utility account may be reviewed and reconciled (trued-up) prior to starting service with your new supplier.

**Q17. My utility has always been reliable. Why should I switch now?**

A17. Switching suppliers may or may not be right for you. But, just like in many other areas of your life, you should be able to choose where you purchase your electricity and natural gas. You may be able to save money or find a product which better suits your needs by switching to a competitive supplier. If you switch, your utility will continue to deliver your electricity or natural gas, and respond to outage problems. Either way, the quality, reliability, and maintenance of your electricity and natural service will not change and will continue to be monitored and regulated by your state public utility commission or public service commission.

**Q18. I just learned about a new competitive energy supplier that seems to offer a better deal than the one I have now. How do I take advantage of it?**

A18. That depends. When you choose a supplier, you commit to a contract (either in writing, by phone or online). Before canceling your existing competitive energy supplier contract, review your agreement to see if there are any penalties for early termination. If you are not sure, call your current supplier to find out when your contract ends, and whether any early termination fees apply if you cancel before the contract expires. Also, be sure to ask your new competitive energy supplier if they have any fees or penalties for cancelling or switching service before signing a contract.

**Q19. I have been solicited by a competitive energy supplier. Can they do that?**

A19. You may be contacted by competitive energy suppliers through a variety of ways, including by telephone, mailers, or door-to-door solicitations. It is up to you whether to continue the conversation. Do not provide your utility account number until you have decided to shop for supply service with a given competitive energy supplier and have entered into a contract.

**Q20. If I buy my energy supply from one of these new competitors, who do I call about outages and repairs?**

A20. You will still call your local utility about electricity and natural gas outages and repairs.

**Q21. Who do I contact if I have billing questions?**

A21. If you have a question about the electricity or natural gas supply charges and you have a contract with a competitive energy supplier, contact that supplier. If you have questions about the delivery portion of your bill, contact your local utility.

**Q22. If I have a problem with a competitive energy supplier or my utility, where can I go for help?**

A22. If you can't resolve your concerns with the competitive energy supplier or utility directly, you may consider bringing the issue to the complaints division or consumer affairs office of your state public utility commission or public service commission. Please see links to state commission websites available at [www.CompetitiveEnergy.org](http://www.CompetitiveEnergy.org) for more information.

**Q23. If I have an unpaid balance on my electric or natural gas account, can I still switch suppliers?**

A23. That depends. In most instances you will need to call your utility and make an arrangement to pay any outstanding balances in your account before you can switch suppliers.