

Natural gas prices bode ill for winter

September rate is MUD's highest ever

Katrina not sole cause

BY NANCY GAARDER
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

The one-two punch of Hurricane Katrina and already-high oil prices is driving the cost of natural gas to unheard of levels for September.

Most Nebraskans will be paying about 63 percent more for natural gas this month than they did at the same time a year ago.

September prices, which are constant for the entire month, were released Thursday. They set an all-time record for the Metropolitan Utilities District — higher even than the prices charged in the depths of the coldest winters.

For Aquila Inc., which serves most of eastern Nebraska and most of Iowa, September prices are just under the record set in January 2001.

Natural gas prices are notoriously volatile, and monthly prices can vary widely, so no one knows whether prices will remain this high through the winter. At the current price, the average January heating bill, based on normal weather in Omaha, would exceed \$215.

"My advice is you have to prepare for high prices," said Scott Keep, MUD senior vice president.

Even before Katrina hit the Gulf of Mexico, site of one-fourth of U.S. natural gas production, MUD was anticipating that September prices would hit extraordinary levels, Keep said.

Damage assessment continues in the gulf, said Mark Stultz, See Gas: Page 2

Rising prices

September natural gas prices, per therm *

Metropolitan Utilities District — \$1.0586

Aquila — Omaha area: \$1.10262

Aquila — Lincoln: \$1.13950

Aquila — Eastern Nebraska (outside of Lincoln and Omaha metro areas): \$1.19126

Aquila-Iowa — \$1.19433

* A therm is a measure of gas. Under typical weather conditions, an Omaha residence uses an average of 19 therms in September. In January, usage rises to an average of 192 therms.

City spiraling downward



A military helicopter carrying relief supplies hovers near the New Orleans convention center Thursday as crew members toss relief supplies overboard. The chopper had made several attempts to land but was driven back by a rushing crowd. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

UNREADY:

The focus on the terrorism threat diminished preparation for natural disasters, including hurricanes in New Orleans. **PAGE 6**

HOSPITALS:

Desperate doctors at two hospitals in New Orleans beg for help. **PAGE 6**

AID DRIVE:

President Bush has asked his father, former President George H.W. Bush, and former President Clinton to lead fundraising for victims. **PAGE 7**

SCHOOLS:

Schools in Nebraska prepare to open their doors to Gulf Coast residents displaced by Hurricane Katrina. **PAGE 9**

LEAVING:

A former Omahan who once thought hurricanes were preferable to tornadoes is Nebraska-bound. **RAINBOW ROWELL, MIDLANDS**

Angry, weary refugees seek food, water — and a way out

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — New Orleans descended into anarchy Thursday, as corpses lay abandoned in street medians, fights and fires broke out, and storm survivors battled for seats on the buses that would carry them away from the chaos. The tired and hungry seethed, saying they had been forsaken.

"I'm not sure I'm going to get out of here alive," said Canadian tourist Larry Mitzel, who handed a reporter his business card in case he goes missing. "I'm scared of riots. I'm scared of the locals. We might get caught in the crossfire."

Four days after Hurricane Katrina roared in with a devastating blow that inflicted potentially thousands of deaths, the frustration, fear and anger mounted, despite the promise of 1,400 National Guardsmen a day to stop the looting and a government relief effort that President Bush called the biggest in U.S. history.

By the end of the day, the American Red Cross announced that its hurricane shelters in seven states were full, with an estimated 76,000 refugees at facilities in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Texas and Arkansas. The official death toll in Mississippi climbed above 100, while



A SWAT team drives past flood victims near New Orleans' convention center. Many residents remain stranded in the city despite an evacuation order. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

officials in Louisiana repeated warnings that thousands could be dead in New Orleans alone.

After accepting more than 11,000 refugees, officials said Thursday night that the Houston Astrodome was full and began sending buses to other shelters in the area.

"We've actually reached capacity for the safety and comfort of the people inside there," American Red Cross spokeswoman Dana Allen said. The to-

tal of 11,375 inside the Astrodome was less than half the estimated 23,000 people who were expected to arrive by bus from New Orleans.

About 15,000 to 20,000 people who had taken shelter at New Orleans convention center grew increasingly hostile after waiting for buses for days amid the filth and the dead.

"We have individuals who are getting raped, we have individuals who

Daunting scale of task unleashes flood of doubts

THE WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON — First they have to pump the flooded city dry, and that will take a minimum of 30 days. Then they will have to flush the drinking water system, making sure they don't recycle the contaminants. Figure another month for that.

The electricians will have to watch out for snakes in the water, wild animals and feral dogs. It will be a good idea to wear hip boots and take care of cuts and scrapes before the toxic slush turns them into festering sores. The power grid might be up in a few weeks, but many months will elapse before everybody's lights come back on.

By that time, a lot of people won't care because they will have taken the insurance money and moved away — forever. Home rebuilding, as opposed to repairs, won't start for a year and will last for years after that.

Even then, there may be nothing normal about New Orleans, because the floodwater, spiked with tons of contaminants ranging from heavy metals and hydrocarbons to industrial waste, human feces and the decayed remains of humans and animals, will linger nearby in the Gulf of Mexico for a decade.

"This is the worst case," Hugh Kauf-

Nebraska Guard units join relief effort

■ Soldiers will bolster security and air crews will deliver food and fuel to hard-hit areas.

BY MARTHA STODDARD
WORLD-HERALD BUREAU

LINCOLN — By land and air, two contingents of Nebraska National Guard troops are heading south to help with hurricane rescue and relief efforts, Gov. Dave Heineman said Thursday.

Forty-five Army National

Guard soldiers, mostly military police from the 192nd Law and Order Detachment, are scheduled to report today and depart this afternoon to help with security.

Heineman said they probably will be assigned to Louisiana, where looters have become a serious threat.

That group will travel in a convoy of Humvees, said Lt. Col. Bob Vrana, public affairs officer for the Nebraska Guard. They should arrive at their destination late Sunday.

Nebraska Air National Guard crews from the 155th Air Refueling Wing, meanwhile, were to fly food and aircraft fuel to the area hit by Hurricane Katrina using their KC-135 Stratotankers.

Two flights took off Thursday afternoon, and Vrana said two

more were planned for today. The timing of the flights depended on when and where the aircraft can land. He said the most likely site would be the Naval Air Station in New Orleans.

Those flights will deliver a total of 66,000 MRE — meals ready to eat — from the Nebraska Guard stockpiles, officials said. The Nebraskans also have been asked to bring aircraft fuel and



Master Sgt. Kim Davila, left, and Staff Sgt. Joe Rodriguez of the Nebraska Air National Guard in Lincoln help load pallets of military meals that are being transported to New Orleans in aid in hurricane relief efforts. NEBRASKA NATIONAL GUARD

Omaha weather

Several hours of sunshine.
High 86; low 62.

Coming Saturday

A number of new Nebraska laws go on the books Sunday, including an anti-meth measure that restricts cold tablet purchases.

DINNER & A MOVIE

The new Italian restaurant Faro's has many of the dishes that once made Raphael's popular.

The time-travel movie "A Sound of Thunder" has its flaws, but it's passable entertainment.

Living

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