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Mild winter forecast could cut fuel costs

Scientists: Season to be warmer than average

BY KRISTINA FIORE DAILY RECORD

After the second warmest summer for the nation and the fifth warmest summer for New Jersey, local and national climatologists are pointing to the possibility of a slightly milder-than-average winter in the state.

To consumers, changing temperatures have more of a short-term economic effect. Last summer's heat meant higher bills for record electricity use for air conditioning.

Price of being cool

Jersey Central Power & Light broke its previous July 2005 record of 6,249 megawatts three times this summer...

Ron Morano, spokesman for JCP&L, said the company has fears that forecast growth and load in response to rising demand driven by higher temperatures.

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FUEL COST FORECAST

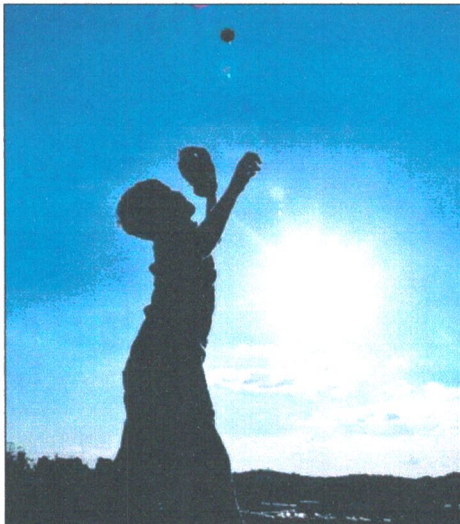
The federal Energy Department on Tuesday issued its price forecast for average households for this winter.

Natural gas users will pay \$826 for home heating, down \$119 or 12.5 percent from last winter.

Those heating with electricity are expected to pay an average of \$639 for heat, up \$56, or 7.4 percent, from last winter.

Fuel oil users can expect to pay \$1,522 on average, up \$91, or 6.3 percent, from last winter.

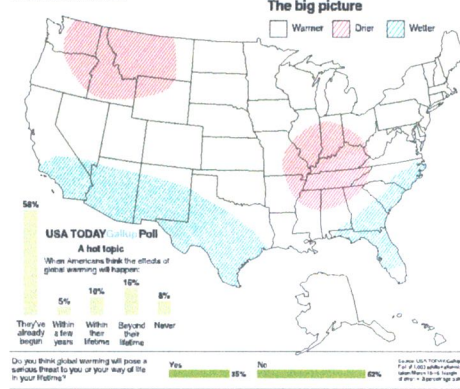
Propane-fueled households are expected to pay an average of \$1,265, down \$13, or 1.1 percent from last year.



Sean Lowery, 7, of Sparta, plays catch at the Sparta-Pope John soccer game on Tuesday. Scientists say recent higher temperatures are a product of El Niño and global climate change.

Forecast: Warmer-than-normal winter for much of the USA

While the global-warming debate rages from universities to Al Gore's s'ivot-screen entry, forecasters say this winter's temperatures should be above average again.



Group to protest at Marine's funeral

Kan. church visits Hanover, says God angry about tolerance of gays

BY DAVID IQBAL DAILY RECORD

MADISON — A religious group that routinely pickets military funerals — claiming that American servicemen and women are dying because God is angry at the country's tolerance toward homosexuality — plans to demonstrate during today's funeral for Marine Lance Cpl. Christopher Cosgrove.

The Westboro Baptist Church, based in Topeka, Kan., announced Tuesday that it would picket the funeral at St. Vincent Martyr Church in Madison, where funeral services for Cosgrove will be held beginning at 10:15 a.m.

Killed in Iraq

Cosgrove, a 2001 graduate of Whippany Park High School, was killed Oct. 1 by a suicide bomber while manning a checkpoint in Iraq.

In a flier announcing its plans for a protest, the church says "God Almighty killed Lance Cpl. Cosgrove" because he fought for the gay-tolerant United States.

Madison police said they were aware of the group's plans, but were not concerned.

SEE FUNERAL / A8

Parents who left child in car get probation

3-year-old was alone as couple went to mall to pick up clothes

BY PEGGY WRIGHT DAILY RECORD

A New York couple, who said they believed their sleeping toddler would be safe alone in their locked car for a half-hour while they shopped at the Rockaway Townsquare mall, were admitted Tuesday into a probationary program for first-time offenders.

Belina Peterson, 42, and her husband Andrew Peterson, 45, both pleaded guilty to endangering the welfare of their 3-year-old son, Simon, and were accepted by Superior Court Judge Vincent Aho into Morris County's Pre-Trial Intervention program.

If they successfully complete two years' probation and 200 hours each of community service, the charges will be dismissed and they will have no criminal records. If they violate probation, they could be sentenced to up to five years in prison.

The Petersons, who met in Canada

SEE PARENTS / A5

IN COURT

'I made a mistake but it wasn't criminal.'

— Belina Peterson, 42, the mother

Oak Ridge man accused of making bomb threat on plane

He became upset after being denied alcohol, passenger says

BY CONNIE HABIN ASSOCIATED PRESS

CLEVELAND — A New Jersey man accused of making a bomb threat on board a Continental flight, causing it to be diverted to Cleveland, was charged Tuesday with disrupting a flight crew.

The FBI identified the man as John M. Azzinaro, 37, of Oak Ridge. If convicted of the one count of interfering with a flight crew,

he faces up to \$1 million in fines and a maximum of 20 years in prison.

The federal charge came less than 21 hours after Newark-bound Continental Express Flight 2772 made the emergency land-

ing at Cleveland Hopkins International Airport shortly after taking off from Cincinnati Monday night.

Azzinaro allegedly told a passenger sitting next to him that he had a bomb, airport spokeswoman Pat Smith said.

The crew opted to divert as a precaution, said Continental spokeswoman Julie King.

All aboard safe

No bomb was discovered and all 14 passengers and three crew members onboard were safe, said

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10/11/06 - Posted from the Daily Record newsroom

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Scientists: Season to be warmer than average

BY KRISTINA FIORE
DAILY RECORD

After the second warmest summer for the nation and the fifth warmest summer for New Jersey, local and national climatologists are pointing to the possibility of a slightly milder-than-average winter in the state.

To scientists, recent higher temperatures are a product of both the El Niño system and global climate change.

To consumers, changing temperatures have more of a short-term economic effect. Last summer's heat meant higher bills for record electricity use for air conditioning. The prospect of a mild winter, however, combined with recently approved natural gas price cuts, could bring balance to the long-term household utility budget.

Price of being cool

Jersey Central Power & Light broke its previous July 2005 record of 6,249 megawatts three times this summer: once on July 18, again on Aug. 1 and finally on Aug. 2 when it churned out 6,680 megawatts.

Ron Morano, spokesman for JCP&L, said the company has teams that forecast growth and load in response to rising demand driven by higher temperatures.

Air-conditioning business owners were also stressed by higher-than-average temperatures. Chuck DeTorres, owner of King George Plumbing, Heating and Air Conditioning in Warren Township, said summer brought a 15 percent jump in business.

"This is an unusually high jump for one year in the air-conditioning business," he said.

DeTorres said last winter was mild, throwing winter business off, but hopes that the coming winter will bring cooler temperatures and more customers.

Gas use down

[Click Image to Zoom \(Opens in New Window\)](#)



DAWN BENKO / DAILY RECORD

Sean Lowery, 7, of Sparta, plays catch at the Sparta vs. Pope John soccer game on Tuesday. Scientists say recent higher temperatures are a product of El Niño and global climate change.

Fuel cost forecast

The federal Energy Department on Tuesday issued its price forecast for average households for this winter:

- Natural gas users will pay \$826 for home heating, down \$119 or 12.5 percent from last winter.
- Those heating with electricity are expected to pay an average of \$839 for heat, up \$58, or 7.4 percent, from last winter.
- Fuel oil users can expect to pay \$1,522 on average, up \$91, or 6.3 percent, from last winter.
- Propane-fueled households are expected to pay an average of \$1,265, down \$15 or 1.1 percent from last year.

Related Graphics:

[Weather map: Warming trends](#)

Note: Graphics will open in a new browser window

While El Niño and general winter warming trends may be working against DeTorres' company, last winter's mild temperatures were a boon to New Jersey Natural Gas customers. Despite Hurricane Katrina's destructive impacts on natural gas supply, warmer temperatures were able to keep demand, and therefore cost, down, said NJNG spokesman Michael Kinney.

"With the winter unseasonably warm, we were able to rely on the storage that we had," Kinney said. "We didn't have to buy at the higher market price at that time."

For this winter, the state Board of Public Utilities approved NJNG's proposed 6.6 percent rate cut, which should lower average bills by about \$11 per month, Kinney said. But while the cost of the commodity has come down, Kinney said, it still remains higher than normal -- like the price of gasoline.

Consumer views

Carol Bennett, of Madison, said lower bills, of course, are "a good thing," even though "you don't know how much they're really going to go down."

"We'll have to wait and see what the bill actually looks like," she said.

Catherine Ruiz, of Madison, took substantial measures to abate the cost of rising electric bills.

"That's why we got into doing what we did with our solar (paneling) system," she said, referencing the solar panels she had installed at her home.

El Niño's role

The experts are crediting their winter forecast to the current El Niño event -- a disruption of the ocean-atmosphere system in the tropical Pacific that affects weather and climate around the world.

"Generally, when there is an El Niño in the Pacific, we don't get exceedingly cold winters in New Jersey," said state climatologist David Robinson. "But that doesn't mean we don't have cold spells or that it doesn't snow."

Climatologists are still unsure about how strong the El Niño, which began in September, will be, according to Jay Lawrimore, chief of the climate monitoring branch at the National Climatic Data Center, a department of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or NOAA.

"(The strength of El Niño) will go a long way in determining winter temperatures," he said. If it is a weak El Niño, he said, temperatures here may not be as mild.

El Niño, which occurs every three to seven years, also tends to stifle development of Atlantic hurricanes, said Robinson, who is also chair of the geography department at Rutgers University. The 2006 season has seen only five hurricanes so far, while last season's 15 included severely damaging storms like Katrina and Rita. During the last El Niño event, in 2003, there were seven hurricanes, according to National Weather Service reports.

Big warming picture

While El Niño might cause warmer temperatures this winter, climatologists said that a general, worldwide warming trend will affect temperatures in seasons to come.

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"In the next decade or century, there's a higher probability of more heat waves and warmer temperatures (in the U.S.)," Lawrimore said. "There's an increasing probability that extreme events will become more frequent in nature, like this summer's heat wave in the central U.S. and western U.S. that moved to the East Coast."

A report released by NOAA last month showed summer 2006's average temperature of 74.5 degrees Fahrenheit to be the second warmest on record for the entire United States since record keeping began in 1895, falling just short of the 1936 Dust-Bowl-era record of 74.7 degrees.

Eight of the nation's past 10 summers, however, have been warmer than the average of 72.1 degrees, the report said. Lawrimore added that 11 of the past 12 winters in the U.S. have been warmer than the average of 33 degrees.

"It's just part of the overall trend we're seeing globally that temperatures are rising and winters are getting warmer," Lawrimore said.

In New Jersey, four of the state's top five hottest summers have occurred within the last seven years, Robinson said. Summer 2006 was the state's fifth warmest summer overall.

"It just so happens to fit in with the general nature of warming trends we've seen nationally and globally," he said.

Lucky in Morris

Stephen Pellettiere Jr. of ION Weather, a Hanover weather forecasting service, said Morris County may not have felt the effects of a record-breaking summer because western areas of the state see cooler temperatures at night, which bring the daily averages down.

Cities like Newark and Jersey City help bring the statewide average up because urbanized areas retain warmer temperatures through the night, he said.

While these regional factors play a major role in local temperature change, Pellettiere said the earth is indeed warming on a large scale – and local residents agree.

Bennett, who grows roses, said warmer winters are beneficial to her flowers that struggle to grow in cold weather, but "on the whole, (global warming) is not good."

Blaine Rothausser, an environmental consultant in Florham Park, said that on a personal level, global warming scares him because it has such a tremendous effect on local biodiversity.

"The fact that it's happening in my short lifetime," he said, "is a scary thought."

Kristina Fiore can be reached at (973) 428-6621 or kfiore@gannett.com.
