

Utility metering, billing change may increase monthly rates

By KIPP SHACKELFORD
Battalion Reporter

Several thousand College Station apartment residents will experience an increase in monthly utility bills when an ordinance which changes the metering and billing process becomes effective today.

The change will involve raising the cost of electricity for master metering projects, which have been paying less per kilowatt-hour, to equal the cost of individual metering.

In individual or residential metering, a separate meter is read for each apartment residence, and the individual tenant pays the city. In master metering, one meter is read for an entire apartment complex. These complexes generally include utility costs in the rent.

Chuck Hardy, president of the College Station Apartment Association, has formed a committee to study what legal action can be taken to prevent the change from going into effect.

"I feel that it would cost less to buy electricity through one point, as in the master-metering system, than through many individual points," Hardy said.

The Apartment Association is presently in touch with an attorney and hopes to appeal the case. Apartment operators and owners have also discussed setting up a bank account for contributions to aid the process.

Hardy said he feels that expenses and risks are much greater with individual metering than master metering. He said that it involves greater labor and transportation costs for the electric company to read and prepare individual bills than for master-metering projects.

Hardy said he feels the city will have more difficulty collecting payments from many individuals than from complexes.

"Apartment rent has gone up at a slower rate than any other product on the consumer market, but now owners will be forced to raise rents for fall and summer," said Hardy.

The ordinance will greatly affect landlords who have signed leases through the end of May. They will be forced to compensate for differences in the rate increase until the leases expire. They will then

have to raise apartment rent, Hardy said.

ling in which the change would cause an increase in rates. Similar to master metering, landlords receive a 10 percent discount from the electric company by hiring their own labor to read meters. The tenants pay less due to the discount.

Two College Station complexes use submetering.

Another plans to convert to the submetering plan in August.

Verda Shelby, manager of the Tree House complex, which plans to change to the submetering process, thinks that prices would be too high for residents if rent was raised to absorb the increase in utility rates.

Another master-metered complex is Monaco, which has decided to raise rents rather than convert to submetering.

"I feel we should get the same break as the submetered apartments because the city has to read only one meter for our complex," said Ronnie Crow, manager of Monaco.

Crow said she feels this ruling will create a hardship on master metered complexes as it will be difficult for them to determine how much rents will have to be raised to compensate for differences in the rates.

Few students know of or use Campus Chest

By MERIL EDWARDS
Battalion Reporter

Only six or seven students have borrowed money from the Campus Chest loan program this semester, said Jim Pratt, Campus Chest director.

"In a student body of 30,000, you'd think there would be more people than this taking out loans," Pratt said. "Most students don't know there is such a thing as Campus Chest, though."

Campus Chest is an emergency loan program operated by the Texas A&M University student government. Students may borrow up to \$100 interest free from Campus Chest when they are not able to secure money from other sources.

Pratt defined an emergency situation as an unforeseen combination of circumstances that calls for immediate financial aid, such as a death in the family, a fire or an accident.

"It is pretty much up to my discretion to decide what is an emergency situation," Pratt said. "We want to help as many students as we can, but just want to make sure there is a legitimate need."

CAMPUS CHEST HAS THE authority to block grades if a loan is not repaid and they have a legal alternative as well.

"The suggestion of action on our part to get the money back is usually enough to motivate a student to repay his loan," Pratt said. "I don't think many students come to borrow with the intention of not repaying the money, but it's just a matter of neglect, of letting it slip and slide."

Many students in the past have let their loans slip and slide. So last fall, the Campus Chest revised their standards. To qualify for a loan, students must not be on scholastic probation or have defaulted on a previous Campus Chest loan. If the loan is not paid back within 60 days, a charge of 50 cents a month is added to the original amount borrowed.

Last year, the Campus Chest was audited and \$3,000 in unpaid loans was discovered to be missing.

Pratt said there was talk at the time of previous directors using the money. "Mainly, though, it was just a mismanagement of funds," he said, "and not enough work was done to get the money back."

"THERE IS ABOUT \$1,500 in outstanding loans since 1976 and we're working on getting that back now. We're not going back any further than that right now."

Campus Chest also sends flowers to the families of students who die while going to school here.

In the past, the money for Campus Chest has come from donations received at home football games.

"In recent years, the donations have declined," Pratt said. "So this year we decided to try a new fund-raising project."

Campus Chest will sell 8-by-12 inch wooden plaques with engraved metal plates of either the school seal or the ring crest on them.

Pratt said the student's name and year of graduation will be engraved on the plaque and special orders for printing variations may be arranged.

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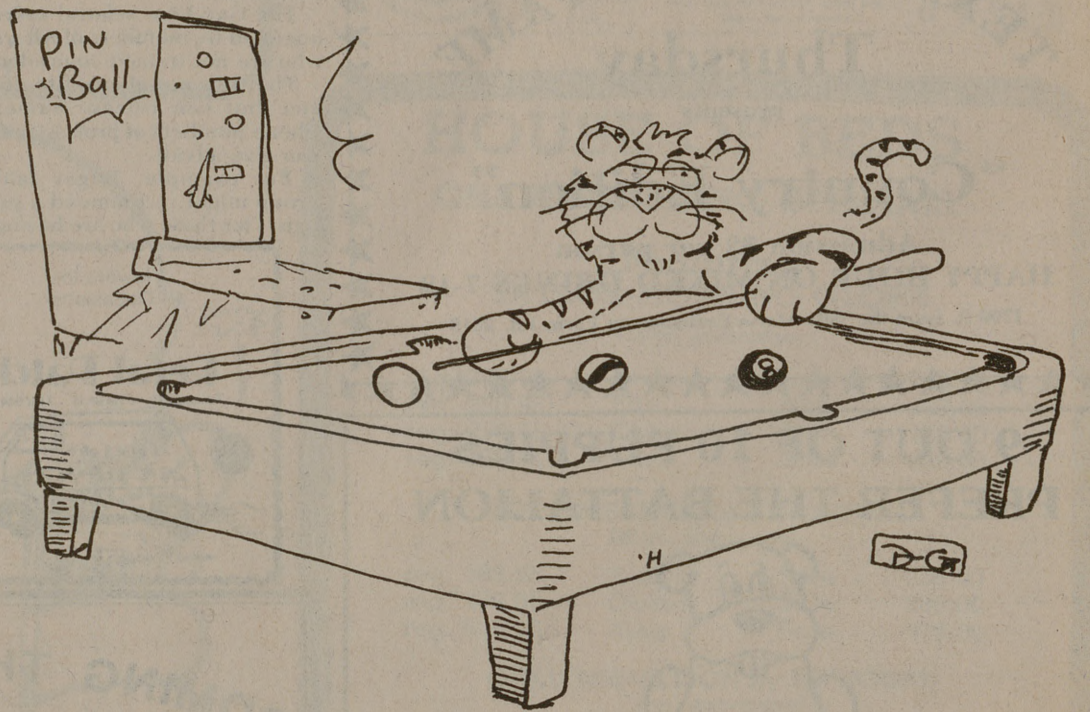
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