

Public Utility Commission of Texas

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PUC Begins Countdown to Electric Customer Choice 100 Weeks Until Statewide Pilot Programs Start

Customer choice for Texas electricity customers is scheduled to begin on June 1, 2001 with the expected launch of several pilot projects to introduce Texans to competition in the electric utility industry.

"We have just 100 weeks to get everything in place for a successful launch," said Pat Wood, III, chairman of the Texas Public Utility Commission (PUC). "Now that the Legislature and Governor Bush have laid out the plan, it is our job to deliver the benefits of electric competition to all Texans."

Senate Bill 7, passed by the Texas Legislature this year and signed into law by Gov. George W. Bush, provides for pilot projects to allow the PUC to evaluate the ability of electric utilities to provide customer choice before the full roll-out of competition on Jan. 1, 2002.

Implementation of the electric restructuring legislation began immediately at the PUC. At a workshop last week the agency worked with industry and customer groups to finalize a schedule for the nearly 40 tasks needed to carry out the law.

The legislation calls for electric utilities in the pilot programs to offer customer choice to at least five percent of their customers. Customers who participate in a pilot project may buy electricity from the retailer of their choice.

In addition, 20 percent of the electricity designated for customer choice must be set aside for aggregated customers such as civic organizations, local governments or businesses with more than one location. Customers currently served by an electric cooperative or municipally owned utility are excluded from pilot projects.

"We encourage all Texans to begin preparing to make the most of their right to choose," said PUC Commissioner Judy Walsh. "For the first time, customers will have choices about joining a group to buy power, and options for innovative, customized services or lower prices."

"This is an excellent time for collaboration among all sides," added PUC Commissioner Brett Perlman. "We're very pleased with the spirit of cooperation we have seen so far."

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Under Senate Bill 7, the electric restructuring bill, every electricity customer in Texas will be able to choose among electric providers on Jan. 1, 2002. Before the pilot program begins on June 1, 2001, the PUC will be developing rules to implement Senate Bill 7, and will design customer education programs to help Texans make informed choices regarding electric service.

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