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Household Energy Use Surged During the Pandemic, But Customer Satisfaction with Energy Utilities Barely Changed, ACSI Data Show

ANN ARBOR, Mich., (March 23, 2021) – Household power consumption surged during the pandemic, but customer perceptions of utilities barely budged.

Residential customer satisfaction with the energy utilities sector overall ticks down 0.1% to 72.0 (on a scale of 0 to 100), according to the [American Customer Satisfaction Index's \(ACSI®\) Energy Utilities Report 2020-2021](#).

Of the three categories the report measures, cooperative energy utilities remain the satisfaction leaders with an unchanged ACSI score of 73, followed closely by investor-owned energy utilities, steady at 72. Only municipal energy utilities decline, with a modest drop of 1.4% to 71. While residential customer satisfaction is mostly flat, all three energy utility categories are among the bottom dozen industries in the Index.

Natural gas service retreats for the third straight year, declining 1% to 75, but still outperforms electricity, which remains unchanged at 71, a record low point since 2004.

“The recent extreme storms and resulting blackouts in Texas occurred after ACSI’s interview period ended, but shined a harsh spotlight on the need for reliable electric service,” says David VanAmburg, Managing Director at the ACSI. “Customers interviewed throughout 2020 note that overall quality and reliability of electric service have diminished compared to 2019. Perceptions of value, however, are stable or slightly improved. Some might view higher bills during the pandemic as a tradeoff to savings in commuting, travel, and restaurants during lockdown. Another factor might be the shutoff moratoria that allowed residential customers to defer utility payments without threat of losing service.”

Atmos Energy, CenterPoint Energy, and NextEra Energy tie for top score among investor-owned utilities

After two years of customer satisfaction decline, the investor-owned energy utility industry overall holds steady with an ACSI score of 72, continuing to match its record low from 2016.

The trio of leading utilities in 2021—Atmos Energy (down 3%), CenterPoint Energy (down 1%), and NextEra Energy (unchanged)—are tied with ACSI scores of 76. This represents the lowest leading ACSI score for the industry over time.

NiSource and Southern Company are steady at 75, a score that remains an all-time low for the latter, while PPL edges up 1% to 74.

A large group of seven utilities hover just above the industry average with ACSI scores of 73. For six of these providers (Ameren, Berkshire Hathaway Energy, Dominion Energy, DTE Energy, Public Service Enterprise Group, and WEC Energy), customer satisfaction shows little movement year over year. Only Consolidated Edison loses more ground—down 3% to 73.

Of the six energy utilities that match the industry average of 72, four (Entergy, Exelon, FirstEnergy, and Xcel Energy) are stable or within a point of their prior score. Two, Edison International and Sempra Energy, slide 3% and 4%, respectively.

CMS Energy declines 3% to 71, matching Duke Energy (unchanged). Close by, the group of smaller investor-owned utilities backtracks 3% to 70 to tie with National Grid (unchanged) and American Electric Power. While American Electric Power shows the most improvement with a jump of 3%, its customer satisfaction stays well below its historic ACSI average of 75.

At the bottom of the industry, Eversource Energy tumbles 6% to 65 and beleaguered PG&E, which emerged from bankruptcy in 2020, drops 3% to 61 after plummeting 10% one year ago.

To enhance understanding of the residential customer experience, the ACSI now measures mobile app performance across the energy utilities sector. With ample resources to invest in apps, the investor-owned category receives its top customer experience marks for both mobile app quality and reliability (79). Relative to most other ACSI industries, however, energy utility apps need to improve as all three categories score below average on these measures.

Salt River Project stumbles, but stays atop municipal energy utilities

Customer satisfaction with municipal energy utilities overall sheds 1.4% to an ACSI score of 71 following two years of slow decline. Perennial industry leader Salt River Project stays atop the category, but wanes 3% to a record low of 75.

CPS Energy edges closer to Salt River Project with a 1% uptick to 73. Smaller municipal energy utilities inch down 1% to 71. After tying with CPS Energy and the smaller providers one year ago, the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (LADWP) plummets 6% to 68.

Touchstone Energy now neck and neck with all other cooperative energy utilities as its decline continues

About the ACSI

The [American Customer Satisfaction Index](http://www.theacsi.org) (ACSI®) has been a national economic indicator for 25 years. It measures and analyzes customer satisfaction with more than 400 companies in 47 industries and 10 economic sectors, including various services of federal and local government agencies. Reported on a scale of 0 to 100, scores are based on data from interviews with roughly 500,000 customers annually. For more information, visit www.theacsi.org.

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