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For more information, contact:

Bob Anderson - 444-6169

Martin Jacobson - 444-6178

PSC TO HOLD HEARING ON PROPOSED INCREASE IN NATURAL GAS RATES

A rate hike for Great Falls Gas Company will be the topic of a hearing by the state Public Service Commission on Wednesday, January 28, in Great Falls. An evening hearing to obtain public comment will begin at 7 p.m. at the city commission chambers, 2nd floor of the Civic Center, #2 Park Drive South.

According to Commissioner Bob Anderson, the company wants the increase because of the higher price it had to pay for natural gas last winter. The request for the rate increase is the major issue in this year's "gas tracker" procedure, which the company files annually in order to adjust rates to reflect the cost it pays for natural gas. Another issue is a proposal for a surcharge associated with rate case expenses.

In its July, 1997, filing, Great Falls Gas proposed to increase rates to raise an additional \$1.88 million in annual revenue, resulting in rate hikes of 13 to 16 percent, depending on rate class. The residential rate would increase by 14 percent. Last September the PSC approved the rate increase on a temporary basis pending a final decision.

The technical portion of the hearing is scheduled to be held at 9 a.m. on Wednesday, although this phase of the hearing could be postponed, depending on the Commission's action on a request by Montana Power Marketing and Trading Company. The Commission is expected to act on this request on Monday.

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