# Participating in the De-regulated Energy Marketplace: Cutting Costs Without Losing Your Shirt

*Paula Coutz, CEM, CEP*
*Program Administrator, Northeast Utilities*
*Joan O. Geronimo, CEM*
*Program Administrator, Northeast Utilities*

ABSTRACT

This article provides vital information energy buyers need to participate in the deregulated energy marketplace, buy energy cost-effectively, and reduce commodity costs. Two energy industry professionals with combined experience of more than 60 years present strategies and insider suggestions to achieve best practices and gain significant savings in energy procurement.

Describing the advantages of participating in the deregulated marketplace, the authors discuss energy issues within businesses and address the importance of understanding that energy expenditures, as operating costs, can be controlled to improve profitability. Grasping patterns in energy consumption and pricing trends, making informed purchasing decisions, and utilizing energy efficiency and demand response programs give energy users an advantage as they compete in today's business environment. Their competitors may already be taking advantage of opportunities in the open market. By gaining an understanding of how commodity resources (both natural gas and electricity) are consumed and how to effectively manage and purchase them, energy buyers can ultimately reduce costs and increase profits.

To conclude, the authors demonstrate that understanding market dynamics, taking steps now to evaluate energy needs, and obtaining the best possible price will enable commodity buyers to reduce their energy costs through prudent market pricing, knowledgeable hedging, and participating in the energy marketplace without "losing your shirt."

## WHY SOLICIT THIRD-PARTY SUPPLY

Participating in the energy marketplace can be advantageous for many reasons. Businesses can purchase energy and manage their consumption to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness in their operations. Controlling operating costs can affect profitability, and reducing energy supply costs has a positive effect on profitability. With a better grasp of energy use and how energy is priced, businesses can be more competitive in today's market. Your competitors may already be taking advantage of the open market. Managers who understand their commodity consumption for both gas and electricity, and know how to effectively manage and purchase these resources, will ultimately reduce costs and increase profits.

Increasingly, corporations strive to demonstrate environmental stewardship by turning to "green" products. You may be able to purchase a portion of your energy from renewable sources, which helps promote newer technologies and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

To illustrate how energy is consumed, we will discuss load shapes and explain how they affect supply pricing. After that discussion, we will explore contracts. Since issues surrounding contracts can be complicated, we will present an overview of the initial process and note specific items to review in the terms and conditions.

To obtain the best price for your commodity, you need to understand the futures market, pricing options, and how to obtain competitive bids. The electricity and natural gas markets are subject to a degree of volatility. We will review how to evaluate potential suppliers so that risk is minimized and your energy supply is assured.

We will demonstrate that by understanding market dynamics, taking steps now to evaluate your energy needs, and obtaining the best possible price, you will be able to buy energy in the de-regulated marketplace without "losing your shirt."

## ASSESS YOUR ENERGY PROFILE

Before shopping for a commodity, you need to understand how much energy you use and when you use it. Remember that the cheapest kilowatt is the one you don't buy.

For electricity, plan to obtain 12 months of usage data from your

local distribution company (LDC). These data should include on-peak and off-peak usage. If your usage is large enough for a time-of-use meter, you will want to request the "interval" load data which will reflect your usage for each 15- or 30-minute period. These are the data that the majority of energy marketers use when pricing the commodity to meet your particular electric requirements.

For gas usage, plan to obtain 24 months of history. With variations in winter weather, usage can differ significantly, and your profile from more than one season presents a more accurate non-weather-related picture.

Conduct an *energy audit* or energy evaluation to determine where and why your facility uses energy. This review is an excellent opportunity to be sure that you are using the most energy efficient technologies for lighting, lighting controls, motors, HVAC systems, chillers, variable frequency drives, and production processes. Take advantage of any conservation advice or programs offered by your local utility or other organizations to retrofit or replace your existing systems before exploring supply options from energy suppliers.

As an example of obtaining energy savings through demand side management, adding a variable frequency drive to an industrial motor can make a significant difference in the motor's energy consumption. The single largest consumers of electric power are industrial motors, which, according to Commodities-now.com, use roughly 65 percent of all the electricity for industrial applications. Many of these motors run at full speed continually because they lack a variable speed drive to control them. With a variable speed drive (VFD or VSD), the user can program the motor to run at any given speed and only when needed, resulting in potential energy savings of up to 60 percent. A VFD, combined with the installation of premium efficiency motors, would achieve a quick return on investment and improve your overall efficiency without affecting your energy supply.

**Improve Your Load Profile**

Whether you choose to address the supply side, manage demand, or incorporate both aspects of energy management, you will want to review your load profile. Your firm's electric load shape or load profile reveals the percentage of time that you use your peak energy. The formula for load factor takes your average hourly usage for the month divided by the KW peak demand. For example, a 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. busi-

ness will have a lower load factor than a factory with three shifts which operates longer hours and on Saturdays. The higher your load factor, the better price you can negotiate from a supplier.

Ways to improve your load factor include reducing overall use through demand-side management programs, or reducing the peak by shifting some load to off-peak hours. You may also want to consider utilizing emergency generation as a way to reduce your peaks, especially during times of high demand. For both gas and electricity, many utilities offer incentives for you to shed load on request, and curtailable and interruptible rates are consistently lower.

## DE-REGULATED COMPONENTS

### Electricity

The three components involved in transporting electricity from the generation plant to your business are: generation (the production of electricity), transmission (the high-voltage towers and lines), and distribution (the poles and wires which deliver electricity to your business or meter). The generation piece, or electric commodity, is the deregulated portion which you can purchase independently. This charge includes the cost of generating power and delivering it to your meter or locational zone, depending on your local distribution company (LDC).

### Natural Gas

For natural gas, there are also three components which make up the total price. The supply cost is the actual commodity of natural gas, brought from the supply source, usually in the Gulf of Mexico. The transportation, or basis cost, is the charge for transporting the gas through the interstate high pressure transmission pipelines through the Henry Hub, to the local city gate or town border station. The local distribution charges carry the gas from the local city gate and deliver it to your meter.

For both gas and electricity, when you buy your commodity from a third-party supplier, you are still responsible for the local transportation charges of the distribution system; poles and wires for the electric company, and delivering the gas from the local city gate to your actual meter. These charges will be included in the bill from your local distribution company, and you would be paying them even if you were

not working with a third-party supplier. Account representatives from your local distribution company will discuss their rates with you so you will understand your "price to compare" when you explore competitive offerings.

## EVALUATE THIRD-PARTY SUPPLIERS

You will need to obtain a list of the eligible, licensed electric or gas suppliers or aggregators in your service territory from your local distribution company, or from your state public utility control website. These entities will be a good reference point as you begin your evaluation of potential suppliers.

Before doing business with a third-party supplier, you want to assess their reliability in the energy marketplace. What is their experience in your area, and how long have they been in business? Are they a regional or national company? If they are a national company, you want to know how well they understand the rules and regulations of your state's department of public utilities and their experience with local distribution companies' enrollment rules and rates. One pitfall to avoid is missed enrollment deadlines. If the third-party supplier is not fully versed in the enrollment guidelines and timing for new accounts for your particular local distribution company, you could sign a contract and then not be served by your supplier if the LDC's mandated enrollment deadline was missed. In this situation, you would still receive commodity supply through the LDC since they are the default supplier of last resort; however, it would remain at their rates and not at your contracted rate with your third-party supplier.

You will want to determine if the potential supplier has the necessary assets to serve your business. Ask how they will obtain the supply that they are providing to you. Do they have the ability to grow with your business?

Discuss pricing questions early. Evaluate a third-party supplier on pricing options and determine which options best suit your needs, such as fixed vs. float pricing and contracts. We will discuss this topic further when we review contract guidelines.

Customer service is an important differentiator for third-party suppliers. What is their customer service commitment to you? Will you be able to speak with someone 24 hours a day, 7 days a week when you

have a billing question? Is there a website where you can view your bill online? Exploring issues such as these is critical before you commit to a long or short-term relationship with a commodity marketer. As a result of your evaluation, plan to identify a short list of suppliers and then prepare to initiate contract reviews and pricing discussions.

Being well-informed is vital. Energy market conditions change rapidly. You should be able to depend on your competitive supplier for industry expertise, updates on market conditions, regulatory trends, and risk management methods. Some suppliers offer weekly energy market updates through their website or email alerts, which keep you appraised of market conditions with one easy-access communiqué.

## CONTRACT REVIEW

Be prepared to evaluate offers from various electric and gas suppliers which will be presented as a part of their contract. Meet with a supplier and review the contract before beginning your pricing process so that you are ready to act upon any pricing opportunity. Your organization's legal department should review the contract's terms and conditions to be sure there are no hidden charges or liabilities. You will want to know the length of the contract available and cancellation provisions.

Components of supplier contracts for electricity can vary and require careful scrutiny. Common components include energy, capacity, ancillary charges, and locational costs. Suppliers may treat these components differently and refer to them in different terms. Be sure no charges are hidden. Some suppliers may pass on the risk or other charges which stem from state and federal regulatory changes. This practice is common, and we suggest you compare suppliers who treat components in the same manner. A supplier who is willing to assume more risk for these unforeseen charges may have an initially higher price to cover their risk. Also, you will want to know if the contract has restrictions on how much electricity or gas you can use and when you may use it. Are you planning any plant additions or shift changes, either increases or decreases, which may impact your future usage? Since contracts are based on historic usage, there may be penalties for usage outside of a 10 percent range plus or minus your monthly usage for the same time period in the previous year (this variation is often called "swing").

Who absorbs penalties from the LDC for pipeline volume variances? Be sure that your supplier has primary firm capacity and the *force majeure* language is clear.

Is having 365 days of reliable supply critical for your business needs, or is an alternate fuel available? Consider the options of an interruptible or curtailable rate. In this case, you will need an alternate fuel or self-generation to offset the load which may be requested by your supplier or your local distribution company.

The timing of your contract term is a significant factor in present and future energy pricing negotiations. Consider when the expiration date of your contract occurs so that you are not re-negotiating energy prices when the market is in a seasonal upswing, such as seeking natural gas pricing in the peak winter months.

Be prepared to negotiate for the terms or risk levels with which you are comfortable. Start your negotiations early and be clear about what you want. Have items ready ahead of time to trade off for your requests. Be alert during this process for hints about customer service and suppliers' internal processes. How the supplier works with you before you are their customer gives you an indication of how they will treat you once you become their customer.

You may also want to consider the environmental impact of the generation source you could be selecting. Specifically for electricity, each electric generation supplier should provide information explaining the environmental characteristics of the electric portfolio they sell. You may want to choose a supplier who integrates a minimum percentage of "green" power. If your organization is sensitive to environmental concerns, this opportunity is excellent for supporting that effort.

## ELECTRIC PRICING OPTIONS

When you are comparing potential offers from various energy marketers, be sure to compare apples with apples; that is, be sure that the components are the same and being managed in the same way. Ask what pricing options are offered and determine which alternatives best suit your needs.

Calculate your potential savings from a specific target price. You will need to know your "price to compare" for the commodity, excluding any transportation or delivery fees, to make this comparison. Not

only will this calculation help compare offers from different suppliers, you will use it to determine whether the chosen supplier meets cost expectations during the contract term.

Various pricing options are available and which one you choose will depend on your risk tolerance and knowledge of the market. A fixed price offers a flat price for the term of the contract. This option has little or no risk, provides budget and cost certainty, and is a good choice for predictable load profiles and low risk tolerance. An *indexed price* can increase or decrease over the term of the contract, based on energy market conditions. It provides an opportunity to lower costs by managing usage in response to market price movements. This choice is best for variable loads with operational flexibility and usage control. A *hybrid contract* is a combination of the two. A fixed price is provided for an agreed-upon base load block of power, and an indexed price is available for usage above or below the base load level. A minimum amount of base load may be locked in under this scenario. A *convertible indexed price* offers the ability to convert the existing indexed price to a fixed price at some point during the contract term. This alternative combines some level of stability along with the opportunity to lock in a lower rate when the market is favorable.

Most contract terms extend from one to three years. Check with your marketer to determine the best pricing term for your particular load profile, since different pricing terms can be advantageous. Generally, most buyers prefer a flat price so that initially they can compare it to other suppliers' prices over the same contract term. However, if your organization has the ability to vary its energy consumption based on market price, watching prices vary based on time-of-use will help shape the operating schedule while saving money.

## GAS PRICING OPTIONS

Gas contracts usually include two pricing components, the basis, or transportation plus line losses, and the NYMEX, which is the actual price for the natural gas commodity. Natural gas is typically purchased in decatherms (DTH) at the city gate. You will want to know how to convert this metric into the unit of measurement your local distribution company utilizes for billing your gas usage at your business meter, typically in ccf or mcf. You will also want to know the line loss factor

for the distribution pipelines from the city gate to the business meter.

Basis and the natural gas may be purchased separately; however, you must have the basis secured before you can purchase the natural gas commodity, often referred to simply as "NYMEX." (Prices for both NYMEX and basis fluctuate based on supply and demand, although the markets are different.) If you lock in basis and NYMEX at the same time for the term of a contract, you will have a *fixed price contract*. If you want the advantage of market fluctuations with some degree of budget stability, you can secure your basis for some term of months, and then lock in your NYMEX for one or more months at a later time. This is known as a *float contract* because the price of NYMEX floats until you authorize your supplier to lock it in and purchase it for you.

One of the advantages of buying at market is that you can request the pricing option which best fits your business needs. If budget certainty is a priority, your deal can be structured with a flat price; both the basis and NYMEX are calculated based on a weighted average of prices and monthly usage data, and the cost per unit purchased will stay the same for the term of the contract.

You may also want to consider a fixed basis price combined with the NYMEX strip price based on the forward market price for each month of your contract. These volumes of natural gas are purchased and locked-in on the day you sign your contract. This alternative would normally not be advantageous for a customer with a gas heating load since the typical monthly gas prices are higher in the winter, when usage would increase. If future prices are substantially lower than present prices (also known as a "backward-dated market"), the monthly strip price may be the better choice. If you require budget certainty, however, the fixed price option is best for you.

As with electric pricing, ask questions about how the supplier manages its pricing efforts. Inquire how long the supplier is willing to hold a quoted price for basis. If you ask the supplier to hold the price for longer than the current business day, most likely there will be a premium for it, if the supplier is willing to do it at all. Ask about the supplier's mechanism for locking in a NYMEX commodity price after you are under contract. In what units are you purchasing the NYMEX? Be sure you can easily convert these units into the same measurement your local distribution company uses so volumes on the bills can be compared.

## EVALUATING BIDS

For both electricity and natural gas, obtain at least three (3) competitive bids. Specify an exact point in time when the bids will be effective; for example, the price is based on the settlement price at the close of a certain date. If possible, be prepared to officially sign the contract the same day that pricing is provided in the event that the market is favorable. Be aware that various suppliers watch the market and may submit a lower price. Do not expect bids to be held for any length of time; usually, 24 hours is the expected time frame. However, if you ask your suppliers to refresh their pricing on another day, be sure that all other elements, including the margins, remain the same.

The supplier's reputation and experience are essential elements in evaluating bids. Request references from customers who are similar in size to your business and location. Prepare your questions in advance, interview the references carefully, and use this opportunity to evaluate suppliers based on the experiences of their existing customers.

The credit-worthiness of the supplier is as important to you as your credit rating will be to them. Ask about the margin and any wholesale fees or wholesale margin. While a supplier may not reveal their precise margin, they should share the price of each component.

Review the level of customer support. How accessible and available is it? Customer services will differ and may give one supplier more value over another in light of your business needs.

After you receive the bids, carefully evaluate each competitive supply proposal. Products and pricing options must be right for you. The contract terms and conditions should be easy to understand and manage. Timely and accurate billing is critical in avoiding frustration and wasted time.

With regard to a successful gas bid, we recommend locking in the quoted basis price based on your preferred competitive bid, and securing NYMEX to meet your budget goal for whatever period of months is most favorable. You do not have to lock in NYMEX for the entire term of a gas contract. You can secure one or more months, not necessarily sequentially, for the term of your contract. If you decide not to lock in the next most current month, your contract would default to the settlement price, which is the closing price of gas on the exchange three business days prior to the end of the month. This settlement period is very volatile; so unless you have a specific strategy, do not schedule

bidding or make NYMEX purchase decisions during this time. (Using market volatility during the settlement period to your advantage is discussed below.)

## HEDGING IN A VOLATILE MARKET

To purchase energy effectively, becoming knowledgeable about general trends in the energy market is imperative. You want to be aware of consistent market dynamics, recognize seasonal trends, and understand how they affect the timing of your bid process and hedging. Several energy websites provide a snapshot of the current markets and present a brief editorial on the relationships and movement between crude oil, natural gas, electricity and global political influences, and international weather. Examples of these websites include futuresource.com, eia.doc.gov, platts.com, and enerfaxdaily.com's "Wellhead to Burnertip" daily narrative. Your own energy marketer may have market information on their website provided as a courtesy for potential customers.

Since 2003, the dramatic increases in the price of crude oil have made the public more keenly aware of the volatility in this market, especially since a majority of the world's crude oil comes from areas that are less than politically stable. However, this geo-political influence also affects the price of natural gas futures, since they are fuel substitutes primarily in the electric generation and industrial sectors of the economy. Traders' hedging activities and weather forecasts, which may foretell the increased need for heat or air conditioning load, affect the price of commodity futures.

Market volatility is predictable during several specific times each month, and this variability can be used to a market participant's advantage.

### Storage Reports

Each Thursday morning, the price of natural gas is affected by the storage report issued by the U.S. E.I.A., the Energy Information Administration. The volume of weekly working gas in underground storage, and the injection into storage during the summer months, or the withdrawal from storage during the winter months, play a key role in the price of natural gas. The current storage level and the weekly withdrawal or injection volumes are compared to the previous year and

to the five-year average. In addition, the weekly number of operating rigs in the Gulf of Mexico impacts the supply of gas available to come online. Market analysts predict what the storage number will be, and variation from this prediction can cause the market to fluctuate. If you are looking for a specific price for natural gas, Thursday morning may be a good time to buy gas by submitting a "strike request" (described below) through your marketer.

**Monthly Close**

The natural gas market is predictably volatile at the monthly close or settlement. As mentioned earlier, three business days before the last business day of the month, the market closes at a price for the upcoming month. For example, if you want to buy natural gas at the market price for September, and August 31st falls on a Friday, the last day to buy gas at market for delivery in September is Wednesday, August 29th. Since some amount of last-minute buying and selling regularly occurs on this day, market swings can be sizable, depending on who's participating, such as large volume traders who are trying to cover their positions. Generally, approximately 55 percent of the gas purchased on the market during the month is sold to another buyer, that is, only about 45 percent of the gas traded on the market is purchased by end-users,* so the market is often very liquid, but at the monthly close, buyers who were speculating and will not actually be buying the gas are eager to sell.

As you can imagine, monthly close can be a buying opportunity; however, the converse is also true. If a large user has been waiting for the market to go down but needs to buy the gas, this is their last chance to buy on the market, and these buyers can push the price up. Their other alternative is to buy the gas at the settlement price, which is the weighted average price during the last 5 minutes the market is open.

As a suggestion, if you want to buy gas on one of these dynamic days and have a specific price at which to buy, place a request for a "strike price." If your marketer entered your request before the market moved to that point and the market trades one cent below your strike price, you know your gas was purchased. However, if the market does not go below your strike price, your gas may not be purchased and you will want to reconsider your strike price.

Another opportunity to buy gas at a specific price during volatile times is to utilize a "strike price" and buy on the overnight market.

Opening at 4:00 p.m., the overnight market generally serves large end-users, such as utility companies, who are buying and selling capacities to meet their short-term needs. The overnight market is characterized by low liquidity and small market changes, but if you are looking for a specific price and can assume the risk of not obtaining your supply, submitting a "strike price" on the overnight is an advantageous alternative. Buyers usually learn whether they obtained their requested volumes and prices the next morning, before the NYMEX opens.

**Holidays**

Other times when market volatility is predictable include days immediately preceding long holiday weekends. In many cases, the market closes early, usually by 1:00 p.m., on the last working day before the holiday. At this time, a number of buyers can be purchasing gas or electricity for the entire three-day weekend and may push market prices up. Also, Friday afternoons in the summer can be dynamic. Many brokers leave early, market liquidity is low, and buyers may be looking for weekend volumes, especially during air conditioning season, when temperature variations can occur quickly.

Besides specific times when market volatility is predictable, other seasonal events can affect energy prices and market dynamics.

**Weather**

As the calendar moves into hurricane season, we will begin to see forecasts of a potential hurricane pushing up the price of natural gas. This upswing is caused by fears of supply interruptions if production rigs in the Gulf of Mexico, a major source of natural gas, are damaged. After Hurricane Katrina, many months passed while rigs were repaired and returned to production.

Electric prices are highly influenced by the gas market since much of the generation is fueled by natural gas. For example, during a hot summer or continuous days of extreme temperatures, gas prices will usually rise due to the need for generating electricity to meet increased air conditioning demand. At times like this, older inefficient plants go on-line to meet the increase in electric demand.

Watching the gas market will help you anticipate changes in electric costs, and having a good working relationship with a trusted marketer will help you negotiate the pitfalls of timing and purchasing in a volatile commodities market.

**Suggestions for Purchasing Gas and Electricity in a Volatile Marketplace**

1. Know your energy needs and anticipate the possibilities a dynamic marketplace offers. Know when *not* to buy.
2. Use strike prices to obtain your commodity at a desired price, but be alert to changes in market direction and adjust your purchase prices accordingly.
3. Explore the possibility of buying on the overnight market with a strike price.
4. Watch the market regularly, know your budget constraints and usage patterns, and work with your marketer to buy energy at prices that fit your needs and market constraints.

**A Word About Aggregations**

If you are a smaller business or a member of a reputable business association, you may wish to consider becoming part of an aggregation. In this way, you may be able to increase your buying power by combining various load profiles for a better price.

For a small management fee, a good aggregator can assist the smaller business owner with this transaction in several ways. They can assist with contract negotiations for favorable terms and conditions to suit their members. They will negotiate with suppliers through a bidding process on your behalf to select the best supplier for all of their members. In this way, they are performing the necessary due diligence which will give you a level of confidence in the supplier and contract which they approve. In addition, they serve as an additional resource, a neutral third party who can offer advice for your business regarding the timing of a purchase, as well as an oversight of the pricing parameters which would be offered to you. Aggregations are another purchasing alternative and work well for some buyers. If you want to participate in the de-regulated marketplace with reduced risk exposure and less direct involvement in efforts such as negotiating contracts, being part of an aggregation may be your best option.

## SUMMARY: RESULTS FROM BUYING AT MARKET

Effectively reducing energy costs requires an integrated approach involving the supply side, the demand side, and a coordination of

these two realms of energy decision-making and management. Our information has focused on the supply side, demonstrating that the energy marketplace offers benefits to participants, and effective buying practices can benefit your organization and help you out-compete your competitors.

Commodities markets are expected to continue to evolve. By knowing your load profile, understanding how your organization uses energy, and being knowledgeable about the energy marketplace, you are positioning your organization to be ready for the next development in the industry. In at least one utility pilot program for residential customers, time-of-use meters and energy management systems with remote access are installed, and customers can monitor market prices and designate a pricing threshold. When that price point is reached, the utility company notifies the customer, and the customer curtails load remotely through its energy management system. For some businesses, this technology is already in place and being utilized. Your preparation for participating in the de-regulated marketplace will also contribute to your organization's ability to readily adopt these technologies and realize the savings they offer.

Finally, by successfully participating in the energy marketplace, you can manage your supply costs; reduce operating expenses, and utilize this alternative to strengthen your organization. You can put de-regulation to work, cut costs, and buy at market without losing your shirt.

**NOTES:**

*Conrath, Dan; Risk Management Incorporated, at Association of Energy Engineers Seminar "Fundamentals of Buying and Selling energy," Philadelphia, October 13-15, 2004.

---

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

An accomplished professional with more than 25 years of experience, **Paula Coutz, CEM, CEP**, has worked in both supply and demand sides of the industry, for utility companies, third-party suppliers, manufacturers, and retailers on the east and west coasts. Specializing in energy issues and energy policy, Paula's MA was from the University of Illinois, Springfield, and she continued post-graduate study at Washington State University in Pullman, WA. While working on the

west coast, Paula managed energy issues for some of California's largest commercial and industrial users and purchased energy for sizable accounts in the Pacific Northwest. Currently employed by Northeast Utilities, Paula works with commercial and industrial customers as they utilize the Connecticut Energy Efficiency Fund and Connecticut Light & Power's Conservation and Load Management programs. In publications and presentations, Paula has addressed a variety of subjects for local, regional, and national audiences. With her experiences in wholesale and retail markets, in both regulated and de-regulated environments, in private and public sectors, including rapid-growth, Fortune 100 corporations, Paula understands energy issues from a variety of perspectives and enjoys sharing her extensive experience, broad-based insights, and light-hearted outlook. Paula can be reached at Northeast Utility Services Company, Conservation & Load Management, 626 Glenbrook Road, Stamford, CT 06906; Tel (203) 352-5451; coutzp@nu.com.

Recently recognized for her 35th year of employment in the energy industry, **Joan Geronimo, CEM**, brings an extensive, change-oriented background from the energy industry. Having worked in both regulated utility operations and de-regulated third-party supply, Joan's depth of experience managing energy issues and customer concerns and her work in regulated and de-regulated settings, in both supply and demand markets, make her uniquely qualified to discuss these subjects. With a BA in business from University of Connecticut, Joan's contributions extend from handling day-to-day business issues to managing energy concerns for some of New England's largest commercial and industrial customers. Her experiences selling gas and electricity in the de-regulated marketplace, working with large-load customers who repeatedly return to her, and her examples of negotiating prices and contracts for aggregations of customers as well as sizable organizations enhance the authenticity of her presentation. Presently implementing Connecticut Light & Power's Conservation and Load Management programs through the Connecticut Energy Efficiency Fund, Joan continues to utilize her significant talents and skills, exercise her sense of humor, and share her wealth of experience. Joan can be reached at Northeast Utility Services Company, Conservation & Load Management, 626 Glenbrook Road, Stamford, CT 06906; Tel (203) 352-5460; gerojo@nu.com.