

Local

Higher Electric Bills Coming As California Drought Slashes Hydroelectric Power Output

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SACRAMENTO (CBS13) — Customers will see higher electric bills this year as the California drought has taken a bite out of the state's hydroelectric power [capacity](#).

At Burgers And Brew, the drought has already raised the cost of supplying the food they serve, and now it will hit them in the air conditioner.

"The cost is tremendous; our bill is really high to begin with," said owner Derar Zawaydeh.

The Sacramento Municipal Utility District says the increase comes at a time when the Sierra snowpack is abnormally low.

"In a normal year we typically get about 25 percent of our electricity from hydro," said spokesman Scott Martin. "This year we expect it to be around 10 or less."

In a normal year, the snowpack would melt and go into reservoirs like SMUD's Union Valley reservoirs in El Dorado County.

"The reservoirs have dams that have [power](#) generation units installed in them, the water flows through those power generation units and we get power from it," he said.

But with little to no snow in the Sierra, there's less water to push the turbines to create energy. SMUD and other power companies now have to rely on more pricey alternatives such as natural gas for power.

The 1.3 percent increase means the average SMUD [customer](#) will be looking at paying \$1.20 extra a month starting on April 10.

While that's not a lot for most people, it adds up for Zawaydeh, who says his electric bill runs into the thousands of dollars each month.

"It's an expense we have to deal with, but at the same time we really have no choice," he said.

PG&E raised its [rates](#) last year and will consider extending that increase this year. SMUD plans to drop the rate increase if we see a normal rain and snow year this season.