Steven L. Beshear Governor

Leonard K. Peters Secretary Energy and Environment Cabinet



Commonwealth of Kentucky Public Service Commission 211 Sower Blvd. P.O. Box 615 Frankfort, Kentucky 40602-0615 Telephone: (502) 564-3940 Fax: (502) 564-3460 psc.ky.gov

#### December 17, 2012

David L. Armstrong Chairman

James W. Gardner Vice Chairman

> Linda Breathitt Commissioner

PARTIES OF RECORD

Re: Case No. 2012-00132

Attached is a copy of the memorandum which is being filed in the record of the abovereferenced case. If you have any comments you would like to make regarding the contents of the informal conference memorandum, please do so within seven days of receipt of this letter. If you have any questions, please contact Allyson Honaker at 502-782-2585, or by e-mail at Allyson.Honaker@ky.gov.

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#xecutive Director

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Attachment

KentuckyUnbridledSpirit.com

Kentu

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#### INTRA-AGENCY MEMORANDUM

#### KENTUCKY PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

- TO: Case File
- FROM: Allyson Honaker Staff Attorney
- DATE: December 17, 2012
- SUBJECT: Case No. 2012-00132 Columbia Gas of Kentucky, Inc. Filing of Customer Choice Survey Results

#### Informal Conference

An informal conference was held in this matter on Thursday, December 6, 2012 at the Commission's offices. Representatives of Columbia Gas of Kentucky, Inc. ("Columbia"), The Matrix Group ("Matrix"), the Columbia survey collaborative, the Attorney General's office, and Commission Staff participated in person or via telephone. An attendance list is attached. The purpose of the conference was to allow Columbia and Matrix the opportunity to make a presentation regarding the results of the Customer Choice survey that was conducted in March and April 2012. A copy of Matrix's power point presentation is attached to this memo.

As the presentation was given, all participants had the opportunity to ask questions or raise concerns regarding the results of the survey. Both Columbia and Matrix answered the participants' questions.

At the conclusion of the presentation and after all questions had been answered, the conference was adjourned.

#### COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY

#### BEFORE THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

In the Matter of:

CASE NO. 2012-00132

## COLUMBIA GAS OF KENTUCKY, INC. FILING OF CUSTOMER CHOICE SURVEY RESULTS

#### SIGN IN

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December 6, 2012

REPRESENTING ogol STAND EARL PS IGS Gnergy (Viaphone) (Viaphone)

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PERSON REPRESENTING Angula Schoor Tom Fitzgetald JEFF SHRW Galway Gnergy (Via phone) Env. Resources Council (Via phone) PSC-FA

Case No. 2012-00132 December 6, 2012

# COLUMBIA GAS OF KENTUCKY CUSTOMER CHOICE SURVEY

Prepared for: Columbia Gas of Kentucky

Prepared by: The Matrix Group, Inc.

Date: December 6, 2012





## **Research Objectives**

The Kentucky Public Service Commission requested that customer perceptions of the Customer Choice program through Columbia Gas of Kentucky be assessed.

The primary objectives of the research were:

- 1. Measure awareness of the Customer Choice program
- 2. Assess the primary reasons for participation in the program
- 3. Understand why customers who are aware of the program choose not to participate
- 4. Quantify the savings that participants perceive they have realized through the program
- 5. Gauge overall satisfaction with the program

TheMatrixGroup

## Methodology

The Matrix Group interviewed 768 Columbia Gas customers in 20 counties by telephone in Central and Eastern Kentucky between March 12, 2012 and April 5, 2012.

Тура	Number	Parcent
Current Choice	375	49%
Previous Choice	47	6%
Never Choice	346	45%

Note: The customer list provided to The Matrix Group by Columbia Gas differentiated Choice and non-Choice customers. During the course of the interviews, some customers self-identified themselves as something other than what the list identified them as. Because the objective of the research was to examine perceptions, The Matrix Group used the customers' self-identification, and not the list identification, to evaluate and report the findings.



## Methodology

List Identity vs. Self-Identity 1.3% 0.8% 100% 12.8% 90% 14.6% ☐ Came from Never 50.3% 80% **Choice List** 70% Came from 60% 1.4% 97.9% **Previous Choice List** 50% 72.3% 40% Came from Choice 30% 48.3% List 20% 10% 0% **Never Choice Previous Choice Current Choice** (Base: 346) (Base: 47) (Base: 375)



## Methodology

- The sub-sample of 375 Choice customers and 393 non-Choice customers provides results for each group at the standard 95% confidence level with a margin of error of +/- 5.03% for Choice, and 4.93% for non-Choice.
- A total of 768 interviews are reported in this study.

Note: Throughout this report, questions allowing multiple responses are marked with an (\*). Totals for these questions may add up to more than 100%.



## PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

## Profile of the respondents

### Area of residence

Arca	Total (Base: 7/68)	Choice (Base: 334)	Non-Choice (Base: 37/2)
Fayette	51.3%	48.0%	55.1%
Bluegrass <sup>1</sup>	26.8%	26.0%	27.1%
Eastern <sup>2</sup>	21.9%	26.0%	17.6%

<sup>1</sup> Franklin, Clark, Scott, Bourbon, Woodford, Estill, Harrison, Jessamine, Madison

<sup>2</sup> Boyd, Greenup, Mason, Montgomery, Lawrence, Floyd, Martin, Pike, Bath, Nicholas

#### Age

Aygo	(Base, 706)	Choice (Base: 354)	Non-Choice (Base: 37/2)
18-24	0.8%		1.6%
25-34	7.5%	2.1%	11.8%
35-44	6.2%	3.0%	9.1%
45-54	11.2%	9.6%	12.6%
55-64	20.5%	24.0%	17.5%
65+	50.1%	59.9%	41.4%
Refused	3.5%	1.5%	5.4%

Residential respondents only



## Profile of the respondents

#### Internet access

Accessio the internet	Total (Base: 706)	with the second of the state of the second second	Non-Choice (Base: 372)
Yes	70.5%	68.9%	72.0%
No	29.5%	31.1%	28.0%

Residential respondents only

Education	Total (Baser 706)	Cholice (Base: 384)	Non=Chollee (Base: 37/2)
Less than high school	7.6%	7.8%	7.5%
High school grad	27.2%	31.7%	23.1%
Some college/ tech school	22.1%	21.3%	22.8%
College grad	28.2%	25.4%	30.6%
Graduate school	11.0%	11.4%	10.8%
Refused	3.8%	2.4%	5.1%

Education

Residential respondents only







## Profile of the respondents - Commercial





## SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH

Commercial Choice customers have participated in the program approximately half as long as the average residential Choice customer. How long have you been a Choice customer?

Length of time in Choice	Total (Base: 375)	Residential (Baset 334)	Commercial (Base: 41)
Less than 2 years	7.5%	6.0%	19.5%
2 to under 10 years	67.5%	68.4%	61.0%
10 or more years	19.7%	21.6%	4.8%
Don't recall	5.3%	4.2%	14.6%
Mean years	5.90	6.17	3.39
Median years	5.0	5.0	2.0



Choice customers ages 55 and older have participated in the Choice program significantly longer than younger Choice customers.





The main reason why Choice customers joined the program was to save money.

The longer-term fixed price was also appealing, though to a much smaller extent than potential cost savings. Thinking back to when you first enrolled in the Choice Program, why did you originally decide to participate?

	Total (Base: 375)	Residential (Base: 384)	Commercial (Base: 41)
To save money	75.2%	75.7%	70.7%
To get a longer term fixed price	19.2%	18.9%	22.0%
Other	5.3%	5.4%	4.9%
Don't know	0.8%	0.6%	2.4%



Thinking back to when you first enrolled in the Choice Program, why did you originally decide to participate?

#### Sample of other responses:

Convenience.

I had to choose a supplier when I moved into this building. I joined as a favor to a friend to help her out with her job. I joined for the price. I just agreed with the letter I got. I just decided to make a change. I just picked a choice. I just wanted to try it out. I like having a choice. (2) I thought I might as well try it. I thought it was a good deal. I took over for another manager, so I can't say why he would have participated. I'm trying something new. It seemed like the thing I needed to do. It's a nice option being offered. Referral from friends. To have different options. We expected unstable gas pricing, and wanted a sure budget. We wanted to look into the different providers and what they offered.

Similarly, the main benefit that Choice customers say they receive from participating in the program is cost savings.

It appears that some Choice customers are confusing the Choice program with the budget payment plan, as many respondents said the greatest benefit they receive through the Choice program is a fixed payment amount.



What is the greatest benefit you receive from participating in the Customer Choice program?\*

	Total (Base: 37/5)	Residential (Base: 384)	Commercial (Base: 41)
Saving money	60.3%	60.2%	61.0%
Fixed payment amount	16.8%	15.3%	29.3%
Fixed rate	7.2%	6.3%	14.6%
I have not received any benefits	6.7%	6.6%	7.3%
Having a choice of providers	0.5%		4.9%
Other	8.5%	9.3%	2.4%
Don't know	7.7%	8.4%	2.4%

#### Selected verbatim responses:

The fixed price. My gas bill has not gone up, even in the colder months. It stays the same.

When I was on a budget, it was nice to know that I would be paying the same price for every bill so I could factor it in.

Since I have participated with the Customer Choice program, my gas bills have been at a set rate for while now. I have not paid more or less. It's the same every month.



What is the greatest benefit you receive from participating in the Customer Choice program?\*

#### Sample of other responses:

Compatible prices.

Convenience.

Good service.

I am happier with the service.

I am not sure if I have saved money or not. I keep paying around the same amount every month.

I assume it's beneficial.

I can't tell any difference anymore. There's not enough information.

I do not know if I have saved money or not. It comes out of my checking account.

I do not know whether I am saving money or not. I have not compared prices.

I do not think it is any cheaper than staying with Columbia Gas.

I don't think there is much of a benefit. It just heats my house.

I feel like if something were to happen with the supply of gas, I would have more security being in the program.

I get great service.

I had no problem with it.

What is the greatest benefit you receive from participating in the Customer Choice program?\*

Sample of other responses (continued):

I like choosing a company to meet my natural gas needs.

*I like having a choice.* 

It gives us a choice to compare different companies to meet our gas needs.

I like having the ability to make the choice.

I like having 30 days to pay the bill.

I'm happy with the program.

It seems to be a good program, but I don't see much of a difference.

It was easier.

It works for me.

It's not expensive.

It's the same great service that is offered by Columbia.

We have always used Columbia Gas, and we feel like the price is very fair.

The auto-draft bill pay - they give enough notice to be sure the correct amount of money can be deposited.

To have heat throughout the whole house when it's winter.

When we get our bill, they explain how much the provider is offering it for.

I honestly don't know if we have received any. It is easy to sign up for, but not easy to change.

Approximately half of Choice customers say they have saved money by participating in the program.

A significant percentage of Choice customers do not know if they have saved any money. Have you saved money by participating in the Choice program?

	Total (Base: 375)	Residential (Base: 334)	Commercial (Base: 41)
Yes	51.5%	51.8%	48.8%
No	6.7%	6.0%	12.2%
Unsure/ Don't know	41.9%	42.2%	39.0%



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Of those who do know they have saved money by participating in the Choice program, most say that they know because their monthly bills are lower.



#### [If you have saved money,] How do you know you have saved money?\*

	Total (Base: 193)	Residential (Base: 173)	Commercial (Base: 20)
Lower monthly bills	90.2%	89.0%	100.0%
By comparing my bill to other people's gas bills	3.6%	4.0%	-
Lower unit rate	2.1%	2.3%	
Other	2.1%	2.3%	4
Don't know	2.1%	2.3%	

#### Other responses:

From what they told me when I switched, it was going to be better. I will call and talk to Columbia in the fall, and they will tell me which is cheaper.

I used to receive something that showed the difference in price, but we don't receive that anymore.

The bills average out about the same.

The perceived average dollar amount saved by participating in the Choice program was \$107.02, and the perceived average percentage saved was 15.1%.



[If you have saved money,] In the course of a year, how much do you think you have saved?\*

	Total (Base: 193)	Residential (Base: 173)	Commercial (Base: 20)
Indicated a dollar amount saved	57.0%	62.4%	10.0%
Indicated a percentage saved	16.6%	16.8%	15.0%
Does not know how much saved	38.9%	34.7%	75.0%

Dollar amount saved	Total (Base: 110)	Residential (Base: 108)	Commercial (Base: 2)
Mean dollars saved	\$107.02	\$107.38	\$87.50
Median dollars saved	\$71.00	\$71.00	\$87.50

#### TOEL Resteanter Gommardel (Beberg) (BERGE 82) (BEFER 29) Percenterestevee Mean percentage 13.3% 15.3% 15.1% saved Median 10.0% 15.0% 10.0% percentage saved

The most common reason why Choice customers who have not saved money continue to participate in the program was because they hope to save money in the future.

Another significant segment of this population remains in the program, because it is easier to stay in the program than to switch back to Columbia. [If you have not saved money,] Why do you continue to participate in the Choice program?\*

	Total (Base: 182)	Residential (Base: 1611)	Commercial (Base: 21)
I hope to save money	43.4%	45.3%	28.6%
It is easier to remain in the program than to switch back to Columbia	28.6%	28.6%	28.6%
I like having a long-term fixed price	15.4%	12.4%	38.1%
My contract with the gas supplier	2.7%	3.1%	
Other	8.8%	9.3%	4.8%
Don't know	1.1%	1.2%	



[If you have not saved money,] Why do you continue to participate in the Choice program?\*

#### Sample of other responses :

I am satisfied with current service. I don't know how to change back to Columbia Gas. (3) I haven't been presented with another option. I haven't gotten around to changing back. I haven't opted out, so I guess I'm participating. I never decided to look into other options. I never thought into it. I plan on changing back. I wanted to see if it would be cheaper. I'm satisfied with the gas rate, because it's reasonable. I'm trying to get out of it, because it's not useful for me anymore. It doesn't cost me anything to continue. It's the lesser of two evils. I just go with the flow. I can't say anything good or bad about the program.

There's no better alternative.

Nearly 80% of Choice respondents said that they would switch back to Columbia if they were not saving money through the Choice program. If your monthly gas bills were not lower as a result of the Choice program, how likely is it that you would switch back to Columbia Gas?

Scale: Very likely = 4; Not at all likely = 1.	Total (Base: 375)	Residential (Base: 334)	Commercial (Base: 41)
Very likely	56.3%	56.9%	51.2%
Somewhat likely	23.5%	23.4%	24.4%
Not very likely	6.1%	6.0%	7.3%
Not at all likely	1.6%	1.5%	2.4%
It depends	4.0%	3.6%	7.3%
Don't know/ Not sure	8.5%	8.7%	7.3%
Mean	3.54	3.55	3.46



Satisfaction with the Choice program was high, with 95% of respondents saying they are satisfied with the program. How satisfied are you with your participation in the Customer Choice program?

Mean	3.44	3.45	3.37
Not at all satisfied	0.8%	0.9%	
Not very satisfied	4.0%	3.9%	4.9%
Somewhat satisfied	45.3%	44.3%	53.7%
Very satisfied	49.9%	50.9%	41.5%
Scale: Very Satisfied = 4; Not at all satisfied = 1	Total (Base: 375)	Residential (Base: 334)	Commercial (Base: 411)



The most common reason for dissatisfaction with the Customer Choice program was a lack of savings. Why are you not satisfied [with your participation in the Customer Choice program]?\*

**Responses about lack of savings:** 

The bills are the same. They did not go down.

Because my bill has gone up compared to my neighbors who live next door to me. It is just me who lives in the house, and I do not use that much gas.

I have not saved money.

I don't like the rate.

I'm not saving money.

They could lower the price more.

I did not see any changes in bills.

They guaranteed that they would be a certain percentage below Columbia Gas, but they are higher.

I am not saving money anymore.

Am not saving money.

There hasn't been anything negative other than not saving money.



The other reasons for dissatisfaction with the program primarily centered on a lack of information and difficulties switching providers.



Why are you not satisfied [with your participation in the Customer Choice program]?\* (Continued)

Other responses:

I'm not aware of what I am saving, and it is not clear how much you are saving.

I tried to change to a different provider, and it was a hassle.

It's a hassle switching back.

I don't really understand it. Columbia Gas should give out more information, so that the customer can tell what would be the best choice. I think the company should just choose the cheapest option for the customer.

I do not know if I am still in it.

I don't really know if I'm really participating. I don't know enough about it.

I got a call from Columbia Gas about a week or so ago about continuing with the program, and they were very pushy, which I did not like.

## Previous Choice Customers

Previous commercial Choice customers left the program after a shorter time period, on average, than previous residential Choice customers.

#### How long were you a Choice customer?

Length of time in Choice	Total (Base: 477)	Residential (Base: 44)	Commercial (Baset 3)
Less than 2 years	23.4%	20.5%	66.7%
2 to under 10 years	68.0%	70.5%	33.3%
10 or more years	4.3%	4.5%	
Don't recall	4.3%	4.5%	
Mean years	2.95	3.07	1.33
Median years	2.00	2.00	1.00



## Previous Choice Customers

The main reason why Previous Choice customers stopped participating in the program was because they were not saving money.



Why are you no longer participating in the Choice program?*			
	Total (Base: 47)	Residential (Base: 44)	Commercial (Base: 3)
I was not saving money	40.4%	38.6%	66.7%
It expired/ I forgot to/ Just didn't renew	12.8%	13.6%	
Columbia Gas was less expensive	10.6%	11.4%	
Moved to a different residence	10.6%	11.4%	-
Prefer Columbia Gas	4.3%	4.5%	
I had problems with my gas supplier	2.1%	2.3%	-
Other	14.9%	15.9%	
Don't know	4.3%	2.3%	33.3%

#### Other responses :

I didn't like it.

I felt it would be simpler if there was an issue if the supplier and those

responsible for gas delivery were the same.

I went to a different supplier.

I'm not sure if I'm still enrolled in it or not.

I'm renting the home.

The company that we were with went under.

We are using electric now.

Columbia Gas of Kentucky Customer Choice Survey

## Never Choice Customers

Approximately one-third of non-Choice customers were aware of the Choice program.

#### Are you aware of the Customer Choice program?

	Total	Residential	Commendal
	(Base: 346)	(Base 328)	(Base: 18)
Yes	33.5%	33.2%	38.9%
No	66.5%	66.8%	61.1%
	······		<u></u>



## Never Choice Customers

Those non-Choice customers who have heard of the program have primarily chosen not to participate because they are satisfied with Columbia Gas.

Many in this population chose not to participate in Choice, because they did not believe they would save money or they did not understand the program. [If you have heard of it,] What has kept you from participating in the Customer Choice program?\*

	Total (Base: 116)	Residential (Base: 109)	Commercial (Base⊧7)
I am satisfied with Columbia Gas	53.4%	52.3%	71.4%
I don't believe I would save money	40.5%	42.2%	14.3%
I don't understand the program	40.5%	40.4%	42.9%
It is too much trouble to switch	27.6%	25.7%	57.1%
I have no interest in participating	6.0%	6.4%	
Just haven't looked into it	3.4%	3.7%	
Other	16.4%	17.4%	



[If you have heard of it,] What has kept you from participating in the Customer Choice program?\*

#### Sample of other responses :

I am too old to be switching companies now.

I did not want to get involved in switching companies. (2)

*I do not like switching to a different company.* 

I do not want to lock into anything right now.

I didn't like being locked into a rate.

I don't like less control with the fixed rate.

I never like a fixed rate.

I don't want to lock in the price. I don't know what will happen to the prices, so I don't want to be locked in.

I'm unsure of when gas rates will rise or fall.

I don't think I want a variable rate.

I don't feel it will give me enough control over monthly gas bill.

I do all bill paying on-line, and completing the Choice program forms on-line isn't an option. I have no need for it.

I haven't found its value yet.

I haven't looked into switching to the Customer Choice program.

I like to use local gas.

I wasn't sure how long I was going to live in my current situation, so I didn't want to commit to something for a year.

*I would rather pay the bill in the winter months and breathe easier in the summer. I'm distrustful of it.*
#### All Respondents

More than 75% of all respondents said that it is important to have the ability to choose from whom they buy their gas supply.

Commercial customers were more likely than residential customers to rate the ability to choose as very important. How important is it to you to have the ability to choose from whom you buy your gas supply, whether you save money or not?

Total/ (Base: 768)	Residential (Base: 706)	Commercial (Basel 62)
44.5% 43.6%		54.8%
32.3%	32.6%	29.0%
11.6%	12.0%	6.5%
6.5%	6.4%	8.1%
5.1%	5.4%	1.6%
3.21	3.20	3.33
	(Bases: 7/68)) 44.5% 32.3% 11.6% 6.5% 5.1%	(Base: 7/63) (Base: 7/05)   44.5% 43.6%   32.3% 32.6%   11.6% 12.0%   6.5% 6.4%   5.1% 5.4%



#### All Respondents

Current Choice customers were significantly more likely than other customers to say that having a choice of gas suppliers is important.

Previous Choice customers were the most likely to say that the ability to choose suppliers is not at all important. How important is it to you to have the ability to choose from whom you buy your gas supply, whether you save money or not?

	Total (Base: 768)	Cunrent (Bases 37/5)	Previous (Base: 47/)	Never - (Base: 346)
Very important	44.5%	53.3%	27.7%	37.3%
Somewhat important	32.3%	28.3%	44.7%	35.0%
Not very important	11.6%	8.8%	10.6%	14.7%
Not at all important	6.5%	5.3%	17.0%	6.4%
Don't know	5.1%	4.3%		6.6%
Mean	3.21	3.35	2.83	3.11





#### All Respondents

Over 80% of respondents did not know that they can compare gas costs on the PSC website.

Previous Choice customers and Commercial customers were the most likely to know they could find gas cost information on the website. Are you aware that you can compare Columbia's gas cost to the gas cost of gas suppliers in the Customer Choice program on the Public Service Commission's website?

	Total	Residentifal	Commercial
Yes	(Base: 7(58)) 18.2%	(Bਰਤਵਾ 7/05) 16.7%	35.5%
No	81.8%	83.3%	64.5%

Totel (Baser 7/63)	Current (Baset 375)	Previous (Base: 47/)	Never (Base: 346)
Yes 18.2%	19.2%	21.3%	16.8%
No 81.8%	80.8%	78.7%	83.2%



# **KEY FINDINGS**

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The initial objectives of the research were:

- 1. Measure awareness of the Customer Choice program
- 2. Assess the primary reasons for participation in the program
- 3. Understand why customers who are aware of the program choose not to participate
- 4. Quantify the savings that participants perceive they have realized through the program
- 5. Gauge overall satisfaction with the program





- 1. Measure awareness of the Customer Choice program
  - Awareness of the Choice program was low among non-Choice customers (33% aware).
  - Both Choice and non-Choice customers were not aware of how the Choice program works and what their options are.
  - Some Choice customers confused the Choice program with the Budget Payment Plan.
  - Many people did not know what the Choice program is, what the benefits of joining are, or how to join.





- 2. Assess the primary reasons for participation in the program
  - The majority of Choice customers joined the program to save money.
  - Commercial Choice respondents were the most likely to say they joined to get a longer term fixed price.
  - Most Previous Choice customers joined the program to save money as well.



- 3. Understand why customers who are aware of the program choose not to participate
  - Of the non-Choice customers who are aware of the Choice program, but choose not to participate, the largest percentage chose not to join because they were satisfied with Columbia Gas.
  - Other significant reasons why aware non-Choice customers chose not to participate were that they did not believe they would save money or they do not understand the program.



- 4. Quantify the savings that participants perceive they have realized through the program
  - The average perceived dollar amount saved through the Choice program was \$107.02.
  - The average perceived percentage amount saved through the Choice program was 15.1%.
  - More than 45% of Choice respondents said they either have not saved any money by participating or do not know if they have saved money.



- 5. Gauge overall satisfaction with the program
  - Satisfaction with the Choice program is high among Current Choice respondents.
  - The primary complaint with the Choice program among both Current and Previous Choice respondents was a lack of savings.





Other findings to note:

- A significant percentage of Choice customers said they would switch back to Columbia Gas if their monthly gas bills were not lower as a result of the Choice program.
- Nearly 85% of all respondents did not know that they could compare gas costs on the Public Service Commission's website.
- It seems that customers are not actively seeking opportunities to choose suppliers, nor are they looking for information to help them make a decision.



### Insights

- One major and unexpected finding of the research was the extent to which customers are confused about the Choice program, and even whether or not they are participating in it.
- Many Choice customers confused the Choice program with the budget payment plan.
- Ultimately, customers need to be much better informed about the Choice program in order for the perceived merits of the program to be fully assessed.
- The Matrix Group recommends that future research into the Choice program takes into consideration the extent of natural gas customers' confusion and misperceptions about the program.

