

Hydro costs slashing profits of Windsor region businesses

Ontario businesses are shutting down or leaving the province as the battle with high hydro rates continue

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Escalating hydro costs continue to put pressure on Ontario residents, who face crippling energy bills, while slashing profits of business owners.

Robbie Shepley has received hydro bills as high as \$1,500 at his ice cream shop in Essex, Ont. That amount is more than double what he typically received eight years ago when he paid up to \$600.

- [Ontario businesses call on province to curb rising electricity prices](#)
- [High hydro costs force restaurant owner to shut down](#)

Those types of costs stifle economic growth, leading to significant job losses as businesses shut down or leave the province to find regions with lower hydro costs, according to the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce, which has lobbied the provincial government to cut rates.

Shepley said he would be able to hire more part-time employees at his seasonal store Ice Cool Treats, if it weren't for the extra expenses.

"I remember when we first started. If we were paying those hydro rates, as well as working for free to get the business started, I don't know if we could have afforded to do it."

Chamber president Matt Marchand has heard from several business owners who are considering moving to places like Ohio, where they face lower energy costs.

"It's the number one issue facing the Chamber and the business community across Ontario," he said. "We have to put a brake on the rising cost of electricity."

Heavy hydro burden

Other businesses in the region are feeling the pinch with some of them going to extreme measures to use less energy.

Shaukat Khan is considering shutting down his Windsor restaurant Kabab N Curry because he can't afford the hydro.

In less than a year, his bills have doubled, despite turning his lights off until customers walk through the door.

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His Indian restaurant has only been open for two years. Hydro bills have wiped out any profit he makes.

"It's not worth it. It's not worth going in debt," he said. "I don't know where to go or what to do."

Shepley had to get creative with his energy use as well. He and his staff turn off air conditioners overnight and they only use three freezers whenever they can.

He has used up to five freezers, but that became far too expensive.

"In mid-summer, we hit a peak time for about two or three weeks when we have to run them all, but that's it," he said. "Then it's a game of cat and mouse of trying to find room for it without having to run an extra freezer."

Taking struggle to Queen's Park

The economy also suffers from the lack of spending as homeowners spend more of their money on hydro, Marchand explained.

Hundreds of Ontario residents took their frustrations to Queen's Park this week, including Cherie Beneteau of Amherstburg.

She has seen her hydro bills more than double in recent months, despite her best efforts to conserve energy.

Beneteau has struggled to keep up with her bills after losing her job when the company moved to the U.S. She is also living on a single income. Her husband died of lung cancer three years ago.

"I'm actually using my retirement savings to pay bills," Beneteau said.

Beneteau has energy efficient appliances, but still the bills remain too high. Recently, she stopped using her furnace to bring down the cost.

She recently started charging her son rent in the family home because she needs the help. She doesn't want to accept the money, but says she has no choice.

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