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Westar Rate Hike Criticized

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) - The largest electric utility in Kansas is drawing strong criticism for proposing to increase its rates by \$152 million a year.

AARP Kansas has called the proposed increases unreasonable, and green-energy advocates argue that part of the plan will discourage consumers from installing solar panels or taking other steps to conserve power.

The Kansas Corporation Commission had its first public hearing Tuesday in Topeka on the proposal from Westar Energy Inc. and plans another Thursday in Wichita.

The company has said it needs the rate increases to cover costs already incurred for plan upgrades.

The company has said its rates would rise by an average of 7.9 percent for all of its 700,000 customers. Westar expects residential customers' bills to increase between \$9 and \$13 a month.

Associated Press