

Mainlines

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2008

A newsletter for the customers of the Holyoke Gas & Electric Department



Winter heating help.

Winter weather is now upon us. And this year, more than ever, many families will be struggling to find a way to cope with winter heating costs. Although HG&E will continue to diligently work to keep our rates low, many Holyoke residents will still be unable to pay their bills. We ask that you take action now, and seek the many sources of aid available. A comprehensive list of contacts is contained in this newsletter, and we ask that you consider requesting aid if you are eligible.

| | Fuel Assistance Help with paying heating bills. | Weatherization Help with insulating your home. | Heating System Help with fixing faulty equipment. |
|---|--|--|---|
| If your Annual Income is Below 60% of the State Median Income <i>see income chart below</i> | LIHEAP Benefits received ranged from \$700 to \$1165 in 2007/2008 heating season. | WAP Average grant of \$1,600 per home in 2007/2008 heating season. | HEARTWAP Emergency repair aid range is \$150-\$200. System replacement aid \$3,000+ |
| | Even if your household income exceeds the amount on the chart below, you may still be eligible for the benefits above if you currently receive SSI (supplemental Social Security) or TAFDC/Welfare. In addition, the Massachusetts Department of Public Utilities (DPU) can also qualify you for aid if they determine a hardship case exists. | | |
| If your Annual Income is Above 60% of the State Median Income <i>see income chart below</i> | Salvation Army Good Neighbor Energy Fund Citizens Energy (Distrigas / Oil Heat Program) | MuniHELPS Line / Free In-Home Energy Audits HG&E Energy Conservation Assistance Program HG&E Winter Check-up Equipment Service ener-G-save Insulation Award Program | |

New Income Eligibility Levels for Aid Programs!

Thousands of people statewide who have not qualified for fuel aid in past years may now be eligible to receive benefits!

Massachusetts Cold Relief Hotline

800-632-8175

Funded by the State, this toll-free hotline puts you in contact with non-profit aid agencies. Call now before the cold weather begins.

2008/2009 Fuel Aid Program Eligibility Chart

LIHEAP / WAP Programs - Massachusetts

| # of People in Household | OLD PROGRAM Maximum Annual Household Income | NEW PROGRAM Maximum Annual Household Income |
|--------------------------|--|--|
| 1 | \$20,800 | \$27,876 |
| 2 | \$28,000 | \$36,454 |
| 3 | \$35,200 | \$45,031 |
| 4 | \$42,400 | \$53,608 |
| 5 | \$49,600 | \$62,186 |
| 6 | \$56,800 | \$70,763 |
| 7 | \$64,000 | \$72,371 |
| 8 | \$71,200 | \$73,979 |

Fuel aid qualification is now based upon 60% of the state median income. Now more families can qualify for assistance!

Summary of Low-Income Programs

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) -

Funded through the US Department of Health and Human services, the LIHEAP program assists low-income individuals and families with the cost of heating their homes during the winter season. Homeowners and renters including households whose cost of heat is included in the rent can apply.

First-time applicants must apply in person at the fuel assistance agency in their area. (in Holyoke this is the Valley Opportunity Council at 300 High St) Households must re-apply each year. It is recommended that you apply for aid early, as funding for this program is often depleted before the heating season ends.

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MuniHELPS Conservation Helpline

888-333-7525

Call with any questions about home energy conservation. You can also qualify for a free in-home energy audit.

The back page of this newsletter contains a comprehensive list of additional aid contacts.

Electric Rate Comparison

October 2008 - Residential customer consuming 500 kwh per month. Amounts shown include all discounts and use the fixed default generation supply price.

| | | |
|---|----------------|--------|
| HG&E | \$59.81 | |
| National Grid <small>serving Northampton</small> | \$88.99 | +48.8% |
| Western Mass Electric <small>serving Springfield</small> | \$94.28 | +57.6% |

Natural Gas Rate Comparison

Average Annual Bill - November 2007 - October 2008
Residential customer consuming 111 CCF/month. (1376 CCF Annual Consumption) Amounts shown include all discounts.

| | | |
|--|-----------------|-------|
| HG&E | \$172.23 | |
| Baystate Gas <small>serving Springfield</small> | \$170.85 | -1.0% |
| Berkshire Gas <small>serving Pittsfield</small> | \$187.78 | +9.0% |

continued from front page

Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) - Funded through the US Department of Energy, WAP is the nation's core program for delivering energy efficiency services to low-income households. Both homeowners and tenants who have their landlord's permission are eligible to apply. In addition to low-income households, those receiving SSI (supplemental social security) or TAFDC/Welfare are automatically eligible.

Professionally trained weatherization crews perform on-site home energy audits using state of the art equipment. These crews install insulation, seal off air leaks, and make modifications to (or replace) existing heating systems. Once installed, these energy saving measures will help to reduce your heating and cooling costs for years to come.

Heating Emergency Assistance Retrofit Task Weatherization Assistance (HEARTWAP) - HEARTWAP provides emergency heating system repair and replacement services to low-income households. The program contracts with licensed and insured heating repair technicians to fix the problem. The program is designed to primarily serve homeowners.

Households will be required to verify their income, household characteristics, address and home ownership. In some instances, households may be required to provide a co-payment. The program prioritizes services to the elderly, people with disabilities, and families with children.

Summary of Other Programs

HG&E Winter Payment Plans - If you think you will have trouble paying your utility bills this winter - contact our customer service department now at 536-9300. We can help you set-up a payment plan now so that you won't fall behind on your bills during the cold winter season.

Distrigas / Citizens Energy - The program offers \$150 in natural gas bill aid to low-income families that are ineligible to receive federal fuel assistance programs, or who have exhausted their federal fuel assistance benefits. Callers to the program hotline at 866-GAS-9918 will be asked to leave a name and address on the message so that Citizens Energy can mail you an application form.

Citizens Energy Oil Heat Program - The program offers delivery of 100 gallons of home heating oil to low-income families that are ineligible to receive federal fuel assistance programs, or who have exhausted their federal fuel assistance benefits. The program begins in December, and applicants should call 877-JOE-4-OIL to determine if they qualify.

Good Neighbor Energy Fund - For customers with a household income which exceeds Fuel Assistance guidelines, the Massachusetts Good Neighbor Energy fund provides \$275 per heating season paid directly to your energy provider. Customers qualify if their income falls between 60%-80% of the State Median Income Level. Call 800-262-1320 to determine if your household qualifies for aid.

Home Energy Conservation Assistance - Our energy conservation program provides homeowners with interest-free assistance on an expanded range of conservation measures. HG&E customers can receive up to \$5,000 in interest-free assistance to insulate your walls or attic, install high-efficiency replacement windows or skylights or install a new gas-fired water heater, boiler or furnace. The finance savings alone under this program is worth more than \$700 over the five-year repayment term, and the average homeowner can expect to save 10% or more on their monthly HG&E energy bill by taking these conservation measures. To learn more, visit our website at: www.hged.com/conserv

Winter Check-Up Program - An HG&E service technician will inspect your gas-fired heating system for just \$10 and have it ready for the winter ahead. The service includes a system safety check, relighting of the pilot, and lubrication of circulators. Contact our service department at (413)536-9300 (option 1) to schedule an appointment.

Service is for natural gas fired boilers and furnaces only. For \$10 service, an appointment must be made and booked for a time during normal business hours (Monday-Friday 9AM-3PM). If the service appointment is booked outside of these time periods, regular service pricing applies. Capacity under this special program is limited, please book early to secure your appointment. Any additional necessary work discovered at time of the inspection may be performed at the Customer's option and will be billed at standard HG&E labor & parts rates. Program is available to residential customers only, limit one specially-priced winter check-up per customer.

FUEL AID PROGRAMS

Valley Opportunity Council

413-552-1548 / www.valleyopp.com

Local agency who administers the federally-funded LIHEAP and HEARTWAP assistance programs.

Springfield Partners for Community Action

413-263-6500 / www.springfieldpartnersinc.com

Local agency who administers the federally-funded WAP weatherization assistance program.

Distrigas / Citizens Energy

1-866-GAS-9918 / www.citizensenergy.com

Provides up to \$150 per heating season to natural gas customers who have exhausted their fuel assistance benefits or those who are ineligible to receive federal fuel assistance.

Citizens Energy Oil Heat Program

1-877-JOE-4-OIL / www.citizensenergy.com

Eligible households who are facing financial hardship are allowed a one-time delivery per heating season of 100 gallons of home heating oil for free. There are no strict income limits and no citizenship requirements.

Council of Churches of Greater Springfield

413-733-2149 / www.councilofchurchesgs.org

The Emergency Fuel Fund program provides financial support to individuals and families to help them purchase heating fuel during the winter months. Funds are limited and priority is given to senior citizens, first-time callers, and families with young children.

Salvation Army Good Neighbor Energy Fund

800-262-1320 / www.magoodneighbor.org

Provides up to \$275 per heating season to needy families who otherwise don't qualify for fuel assistance programs. (60%-80% of State Median Income Level)

ener-G-save

866-634-3021 / www.ener-g-save.org

Provides a \$50 award to Western Massachusetts homeowners who insulate their attics.

OTHER HELPFUL CONTACTS

211 First Call for Help - United Way

211 / www.mass211.org

Dialing 2-1-1 on your telephone connects you to free information on health and human service programs.

Residential Assistance for Families in Transition

413-233-1500 / www.haphousing.org

RAFT is a state-funded program that helps families who are behind on rent, mortgage payments or utility bills. Families who are selected can get a one-time aid grant of up to \$3000. Your household income must be at or below 50% of the area median income to qualify. (below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level)

Holyoke Council on Aging

413-322-5625 / www.holyoke.org

City Department that provides services to enhance the lives of elders and help them and their families navigate the often confusing elder aid service network.

a reminder:

Please make sure that the sewer and storm drain basins near your property are clean of leaves and debris.

Standing water on city streets can quickly become dangerous ice slicks.