



## *National Fuel Funds Network*

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### **Energy Safety Net Bulletin #93**

Dear Member: We all know that the summer's heat can be just as dangerous as the winter's cold, especially to the elderly, the very young and those with health problems. Newspaper reports from around the country have attributed at least 17 deaths to heat related causes so far this summer.

Heat waves and unusually high temperatures have hit nearly every region of the country, prompting responses from state and local governments, utilities, and energy assistance programs.

Some states and cities have activated their heat emergency plans, opened cooling centers and taken over steps to inform their residents how to cope with the hot weather. Utilities are including information on how to reduce summer energy costs in their bills and energy assistance programs are providing grants to help people pay their increased home energy bills.

If your program is running a summer cooling program, the NFFN would like to hear from you, particularly about your response to the current heat wave. Please call or email us with information on your program. We will compile the information we receive from you and make it available to the rest of our members.

#### **Fuel Fund Activities**

- Connecticut's Operation Fuel has made \$50,000 available for summer energy assistance. Pat Wrice, executive director of Operation Fuel, said the grants of up to \$200 would be awarded to people who are facing shut-off notices or other financial emergencies related to energy services.

#### **State Government Actions**

- The Texas Public Utility Commission has approved an emergency rule prohibiting disconnections of elderly, low-income customers until Oct. 1 and expanding payment options to all low-income customers during the summer.

The ruling blocks electric providers from disconnecting all critical care customers in which a suspension of electric service will create a life-threatening situation. Those

customers will be required to pay at least 25 percent of their outstanding bill starting in October with the remainder due within five months.

Also Texas electric utilities are prohibited from disconnecting low-income customers who are at least 65 years old. Those customers will also be required to pay at least 25 percent of their outstanding bill beginning in October.

Low-income customers under 65 can prevent disconnections by using a deferred payment plan requiring payment of no more than 25 percent of their bill with the deferred amount due within five months.

PUC chairman Paul Hudson said, "In the face of extremely hot temperatures, (this) decisive action helps protect our state's most vulnerable electric customers." Vernon Pierce, customer service director for Entergy, said, "We are working together to help our customers most in need – the elderly, low income and those with critical care needs."

- Low-income residents of North Carolina, who received energy assistance grants during the winter, are being mailed additional energy assistance funds to help them pay electricity bills during the summer. The state is using the remainder of its LIHEAP allocation to make the assistance grants available.

North Carolina received an additional \$32.1 million in LIHEAP funds in earlier this year after \$1 billion in federal funds were added to the program. More than 220,000 residents are expected to receive the grants, which will range from \$25 to \$82.

- In Pennsylvania, a proposal to tighten eligibility requirements for LIHEAP has been met with strong opposition. Under the changes proposed by the state Department of Public Welfare, which administers the program, a family of four would have to earn \$27,000 or less to receive aid. Currently a family of four making \$29,025 or less is eligible for the program.

Opponents of the changes, which would move eligibility from 150 percent of the federal poverty level to 135 percent, said that 123,000 fewer families would receive assistance if the plan goes forward.

- Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich has announced that the state would make \$8 million in funding available for a summer assistance program beginning July 31. The governor also announced that ComEd had given the state \$1 million for the summer assistance program.

The summer LIHEAP program will run until August 18 or until the funding is exhausted. The grants will be distributed on a first come first serve basis and administered through a network of 36 local agencies.

The governor also launched a Keep Cool Illinois campaign designed to inform residents how to prevent heat-related health problems, reduce their utility bills and

participate in summer activities safely. The state is opening cooling centers and has set up a website – [www.keepcool.illinois.gov](http://www.keepcool.illinois.gov).

### **Utility Actions**

- Reliant Energy announced that it is doubling its funding for low-income energy assistance programs, bringing its total contribution for 2006 to \$1 million. The funds would go to a series of programs including the Community Assistance by Reliant Energy (CARE) program, which provides energy assistance grants to customers experiencing extreme hardships and are unable to pay their electricity bill.

Additional funds would also go to the Rebuilding Together Houston program, which provides energy efficiency improvements to the homes of low-income senior and disabled residents of Houston. The program has now been expanded to include residents of the Dallas/Fort Worth area.

The utility, in conjunction with the City of Houston, has created nine “Beat the Heat” centers to help people cope with the summer’s heat. Reliant provides transportation to the centers as well as movies, games and snacks at the centers.

- TXU Energy has committed \$300,000 to help residents of Dallas and Tarrant County deal with problems caused by summer heat. The funds will be used in part to expand the utility’s “Check on Your Neighbor” program, a collaboration with state social service agencies to deliver meals to low-income and disabled residents and educate them on the dangers of summer heat.

### **Reports and Studies**

- The total number of households receiving heating assistance last winter increased by 12 percent to almost 5.8 million households, according to a report produced by the National Energy Assistance Directors Association (NEADA).

According to NEADA, the number of households receiving heating assistance is the highest total in 13 years. The report stated that the number of households receiving cooling assistance is expected to jump to 594,441, 88.6 percent higher than last year’s level of 279,036 and the highest level in the history of the program.

The complete NEADA report can be viewed at the NEADA website – [www.neada.org](http://www.neada.org).