



National Fuel Funds Network

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Dear Member: As searing summer heat continued to move across the country and heat related deaths continued to rise, the National Fuel Funds Network wrote to President Bush urging him to release all of the remaining LIHEAP contingency funds.

With reports that many states were using their remaining LIHEAP funds to provide assistance to households facing increased electricity bills, driven in part by the excessive heat, the NFFN asked the president to make the \$102 million in LIHEAP contingency funds available in a July 31 letter.

The National Energy Assistance Directors Association (NEADA) and the American Gas Association (AGA) also wrote to President Bush urging the release of the LIHEAP funds. LIHEAP supporters in the House and Senate have also written to the president pressing for the release of the contingency funds.

This summer's sizzling weather has once again demonstrated the need for adequate funding for the federal energy assistance program. Rising electricity rates coupled with increased usage caused by hot weather have dramatically increased the demand for assistance.

In lieu of available aid, many people are being forced to make decisions that in some cases have led to tragic consequences. A report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on heat related deaths (see Reports and Studies below) noted that the elderly made up 40 percent of the deaths reported between 1999 and 2003.

Fresno, CA Mayor Alan Autry, in an appearance on PBS' Newshour with Jim Lehrer said "But I will tell you one point, and it's (a) sad point, and it's something we're going to have to address, is we have a lot of the elderly they are not turning on their air conditioning because they simply can't afford it. That's sad when that could be a death sentence. You have to choose between food on your table and cool air to keep you alive. Now, that's a question we need to look at, not only here in the San Joaquin Valley and the state of California, but across this nation."

The information that NFFN has received from our members detailing what their programs are doing this summer has been very useful, as it continues to work toward

the release of more federal funds. **Please continue to keep NFFN informed** through your emails, letters and telephone calls.

California Heat Wave

National Fuel Funds Network members in California report the following responses to the searing heat storm there.

- In the wake of the heat wave in California representatives of several California LIHEAP providers met in San Jose with state Department of Community Services and Development (CSD) officials and voted to create a disaster committee which will plan energy and assistance related responses to many types of disasters, heat storms among them. Lois Carson of the Department of Community Action in Riverside, will chair the committee and John Martinez will serve as the CSD staff liaison. Hotel (with air conditioning) vouchers and taxi transportation (to cooling centers and hotels) vouchers for those at risk are among the intervention measures, which will be considered.
- The California Public Utilities Commission, the CDS and the state's Low Income Oversight Board are considering the possible extension to the summer months of the Commission's "Winter Initiative" in which public utilities offer increased assistance amount maximums, extended payment arrangements, and disconnection moratoriums as a means of dealing with future heat emergencies.
- Many LIHEAP providers in California coordinated regional "cooling centers" and several providers offered the loan and installation of portable air conditioner units for at risk constituents with no operational cooling resources available in their residence. Other LIHEAP agencies provided portable generators to install (on a loaned basis) to keep air conditions running in homes of medically at risk clients should an extended outage occur.
- Lois Carson of Riverside California's Department of Community Action reported that her agency provide solar/battery powered outdoor lighting to seniors living in high crime areas. The idea is that seniors often feel more secure leaving doors and windows open after dark when adequate outdoor lighting is available. Local police refer prospective recipients to the agency, which then arranges for installation of the lighting.
- The Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD) has for the past several years offered loans of portable evaporative coolers to those vulnerable to the ravages of excessive heat. Community agencies are encouraged to refer low-income customers to SMUD for assistance when temperatures are extreme and their cooling system is inoperative or when no system is present. In addition to the loaner, SMUD worked with any referred customer whose system needed to be fixed to get needed repairs.

- Southern California Edison has deferred implementation of a scheduled 2 percent increase in electric rates until November 4. Utility officials said the decision to delay the increase was made because of the heat wave that hit the state in July. The company increased rates by 15 percent earlier in the year.
- The Pacific Gas and Electric Company, in response to the recent heat wave in California, has added \$100,000 to the REACH program. The Relief Energy Assistance through Community Help (REACH) program provides assistance grants to low-income customers who might lose their service because of unforeseen hardships.

Fuel Fund Activities

- HeartShare Human Services in New York is administering assistance grants to help low-income households in the five boroughs of New York City and Westchester pay their electric bills. The Neighborhood Fund Program is sponsored by Entergy Nuclear Northeast (Indian Point) and its employees, which have contributed \$50,000 to fund the program.
- To help combat the excessive summer heat, the Salvation Army in Oklahoma and parts of Arkansas is collecting fans to be distributed to persons who do not have them. The organization is also operating cooling centers and passing out cold water in low-income neighborhoods.
- In Dubuque, IA, Tom Stovall of the Operation: New View Community Action Agency reported that the organization distributed 340 fans to low-income households.
- The Muscogee (Creek) Nation in Oklahoma reports having started its LIHEAP summer cooling program for past participants in April and that it was still running during the heat wave. “We anticipate running the program until September; that is, if we do not run out of funds,” said Christie Baldrige, the Nation’s Social Services Supervisor.
- Oregon Heat reported that a record number of households received assistance from the agency last winter. According to Oregon Heat executive director Roger Rees 12,605 people, representing almost 37,500 adults and children throughout the state, received aid from the program from July 2005 to June 2006. The total was a 160 percent increase from the previous year when 4,863 households (14,299 individuals) were served. The total cost to provide energy assistance reached more than \$3.2 million.

“A record level of need requires a record level of assistance,” said Roger Rees, executive director of Oregon HEAT. “Our achievements this year show what can

be accomplished with strong public support and the commitment of our partnering agencies.”

Utility Actions

- In response to the high temperatures in the south, Entergy, partnered with local LIHEAP agencies, to conduct a special outbound calling program to inform customers of available LIHEAP funds. Calls were made to more than 9,000-targeted customers.

In Mississippi, a special mailing, containing information about LIHEAP assistance, bill payment assistance programs, and energy efficiency, was sent to 10,000-targeted low-income customers. In addition, Entergy sent information about LIHEAP by e-mail to faith-based organizations in their service area.

- Clark Public Utilities, which provides electric service to Clark County, WA, will not disconnect customers when temperatures are expected to reach 90 degrees or more on any give day. In addition, the Clark Regional Emergency Services Agency has established several cooling stations for people in need of a cool place to stay for health reasons during the recent heat wave.

Reports and Studies

- A report examining heat related deaths in the US from 1999 to 2003 found that “the risk factors for death from heat correlate strongly with the conditions you find in poverty.” The report was prepared by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also concluded “every one of those deaths is preventable if folks are aware of some of the prevention measures.”

The report was published in the CDC journal *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, which is available on the agency’s website – www.cdc.gov.

New Website

- The National Council on Aging has developed a website to help the elderly find out what federal and state assistance programs they are eligible for. The site, BenefitsCheckUp, features a database of hundreds of programs ranging from energy assistance, financial help, and health care to employment and volunteer opportunities.

Users of the site are asked to complete a brief, confidential questionnaire and based on the answers the site generates a list of programs with descriptions and contact information.

The site is <http://benefitscheckup.org>.

Congress Adjourns

Congress has adjourned until after Labor Day, without having passed the LIHEAP appropriation. See NFFN's July 19 ACTION ALERT at www.nationalfuelfunds.org/alert-7-19-2006.pdf, and look for an ACTION ALERT next week on what members can do during the August recess.