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## National Fuel Funds Network

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### **Energy Safety Net Bulletin #139**

The House of Representatives on Friday passed major climate change legislation, which sets limits on green house gas emissions and is designed to reduce US dependence on foreign oil.

The American Climate and Energy Safety Act was approved by the narrow margin of 219 to 212. The legislation now goes to the Senate where it is expected to be combined with clean energy legislation, which recently was approved by the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. The House bill calls for an overall limit on carbon dioxide emissions and requires companies that emit those gases to purchase allowances for each ton of carbon they emit.

Fifteen percent of the proceeds from the sale of these emission allowances would be used to provide relief for low income households from the expected increases in the costs for energy and other goods and services. For some of the eligible households the relief would come in the form of an Energy Tax Credit. Others would receive direct monthly payments from the newly created Energy Refund Program.

The Environmental Protection Agency would develop the formula that would determine the size of the Energy Tax Credit or the payment from the Energy Refund Program. The Energy Tax Credit would be factored into an individual's federal income tax return. The payments from the Energy Refund Program would be distributed through the electronic benefit transfer systems used by state's departments of human services.

Additional help with the increased energy costs would come from provisions in the legislation that give free emissions allowances to local distribution companies for the purpose of providing their customers with relief on their utility bills. The extent of the assistance would be determined by each state's utility regulators.

NFFN will continue to monitor this legislation and will provide members with more information as the bill continues to move through the Congress.

### **National Utility and Energy Affordability Conference**

- The National Energy and Utility Affordability Conference attracted more than 600 conferees for the three day session at Portland's Doubletree Hotel. The conference featured more than 60 workshops and panel discussions covering a wide range of issues from climate control legislation to fund raising techniques. Watch the NFFN's website, the conference website <<http://www.neuac.org>> and the next issue of the National Energy Assistance Report for a more detailed account of the conference and photos from the event.

### **Fuel Fund Actions**

- The Fuel Fund of Maryland has received a \$35,000 grant from Citi, sponsor of the "Watt Watchers of Maryland" energy conservation and financial education program, to expand the program. The Fuel Fund of Maryland will use the additional funds to add at least three additional sites in Prince George's and Montgomery County as well as to hire an intern to develop a data collection system, purchase more materials and enhance the existing curriculum. The "Watt Watchers of Maryland" program is designed to help customers better understand their utility bills and what they can do to save money. The program also includes financial management education.
- The Dollar Energy Fund, based in Pittsburgh, reported it experienced a 220 percent increase in demand for utility assistance grants in May 2009 over the same period last year. The fuel fund received 2330 applications for assistance in May and provided more than \$754,000 in grants to low income families, seniors and individuals.
- The Heat and Warmth Fund (THAW) of Michigan provided \$11.7 million in emergency assistance to nearly 10,000 residential utility customers during the 2008-09 heating season, an increase of nearly \$800,000 from the previous year.

John X. Miller, THAW's CEO, said "It's a testament to our community spirit in Michigan that we were able to hold the line with our program funding even through a time of great economic uncertainty. While many of our existing supporters had to cut their giving, we were fortunate to build a number of new relationships with family foundations, individual donors and others who allowed us to follow through on our mission."

### **State Government Actions**

- The New Jersey Legislative Assembly is scheduled to consider a bill that would redistribute funds generated by the state's Societal Benefits Charge to increase assistance to households having trouble paying their energy bills. The bill, sponsored by Telecommunications and Utilities Committee chairman Upendra Chivukula, would assure that 10 percent of the funds would be placed in a special account dedicated for energy assistance. The funds would be distributed through non-profits like NJSHARES.
- Indiana state legislators are being urged to approve legislation that would continue to exempt LIHEAP funds from state sales taxes. Supporters of the legislation claim that if the exemption is not continued the state will take millions of federal energy assistance dollars from vulnerable people who need to heat their homes. The exemption was enacted in 2006

but is set to expire this year.

### **Energy Saving Campaign**

· The National Fuel Funds Network has again become a partner in a national campaign to help drivers reduce their gasoline expenses through good vehicle maintenance and wise driving habits. The “Drive Smarter Challenge” is a national effort to educate drivers in some simple practices they can use to help them save money on gasoline. The “Drive Smarter Challenge” has an interactive website with a calculator that will show users exactly how much money they can save by adopting six vehicle care and driving tips.

The website – <<http://www.drivesmartchallenge.org>> – maintains a running total of the cumulative money, gallons and CO2 emission savings of everyone who has taken the challenge. Those taking the challenge can download a \$10 coupon towards the purchase of Mobil 1 Advanced Fuel Economy motor oil.

Other partners in this campaign are the National Low Income Energy Consortium, Alliance to Save Energy, American Petroleum institute, American Public Transportation Association, Car Care Council, Department of Energy’s Oak Ridge National Laboratory, ExxonMobil, League of American Bicyclists, NASCAR, National Association of Counties, National Association of State Energy Officials, National Independent Auto Dealers Association, and Rubber Manufacturers Association’s Be Tire Smart.

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