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## National Fuel Funds Network

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August 10, 2009

### **Energy Safety Net Bulletin #141**

The number of households receiving assistance in paying their utility bills the last 10 months has reached record numbers in many parts of the country. A combination of economic factors, weather and increased energy prices has left many households struggling to pay their bills.

In Montgomery County, Md, a record 3,095 households sought help with their utility bills during June and July, according to county officials. The number of people seeking aid was almost 23 percent more than the 2,523 residents who sought the county's help paying energy bills in June and July 2008, officials said.

"We're seeing a record number of residents who are in need of energy assistance and experiencing significant stress since late April, when the moratorium on utility cutoffs was lifted," said Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services <[http://www.gazette.net/stories/08052009/montnew182106\\_32522.shtml](http://www.gazette.net/stories/08052009/montnew182106_32522.shtml)> Director Uma Ahluwalia.

More than 10,000 Montgomery residents applied for assistance, and more than 8,000 received it from the county program during the latest full budget cycle, a county spokesperson said. The number of applicants for the year was the highest on record, she said.

Clay Anderson, a spokesman for Pepco an electric utility, said that about 36,172, or 9.8 percent, of Pepco's 300,765 residential customers in Montgomery were late paying their bills. Of those, 11,748 are more than 90 days late in paying, he said.

On the other side of the country in Washington, a record number of Puget Sound Energy customers received a record amount of assistance to pay their energy bills.

From October 2008 through July 2009, nearly 25,000 PSE households — a 28 percent increase over the previous record set last year — received assistance with their utility bill. During that period of time, PSE customers received a record \$26 million, a 37 percent increase from the previous year, in grants from the federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program and from PSE's Home Energy Lifeline Program, or HELP, in addition to

bill-payment assistance through The Salvation Army Warm Home Fund.

“While these difficult times have created high demand among our customers for help with their energy bills, we are pleased that this past year’s increased funding of both LIHEAP and HELP made a difference by reaching more customers and having available funds stretch into the summer months,” said Suzanne Hanson, energy assistance program manager for PSE.

Community action agencies serving residents in PSE’s 11-county Washington state service area this year granted approximately \$14 million in LIHEAP and \$12 million in HELP to qualified low-income customers.

Additionally, more than 3,500 PSE households needing emergency, short-term bill assistance during this past year’s winter heating months received grants from The Salvation Army Warm Home Fund. This year’s nearly \$653,000 in donations, representing a 9 percent increase from last year, came from voluntary contributions from PSE customers and employees and included a \$50,000 grant from PSE. No ratepayer dollars fund PSE’s donations to the Warm Home Fund.

The NFFN needs to know what the situation is in your community. Please call, write, email or fax us information about the number of households your program has assisted. The information you provide to us will be used to generate more support for federal energy programs in Congress.

## **LIHEAP UPDATE**

- The Senate Appropriations Committee included \$5.1 billion in funding for LIHEAP in the FY 2010 Labor, HHS and Education appropriations bill. The measure will be taken up by the full Senate when Congress returns from its August recess. The House of Representatives passed its version of the Labor, HHS and Education appropriations bill and funded LIHEAP at 5.1 billion. This level of funding for LIHEAP is \$1.9 billion less than President Obama requested.

## **Climate Change Legislation**

- The Senate is expected to begin work on a climate change bill when it returns from its August recess. According to published reports, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid has set September 18 as a deadline for five committees to pass portions of the bill. The House passed their version of climate change legislation called the American Clean Energy and Security Act. The Senate bill is expected to include some of the provisions of the House bill but a House Senate conference will be necessary to work out any differences in the two bills.

## **Fuel Fund Actions**

- New Jersey SHARES has been designated by the state Board of Public Utilities to receive the proceeds from the quarterly auction of emission allowances conducted as part of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative this year.

The first two quarterly auctions generated a total of \$5.8 million which New Jersey SHARES

is using to provide assistance to residents in the midst of electric bill payment crisis. It is estimated that the remaining two auctions may generate about \$2.8 million each. Additionally, New Jersey SHARES reported that the state budget includes \$5 million in funding for the program which will use the funds to provide assistance to residents with all types of fuel.

- Energy Outreach Colorado is providing an additional \$1.03 million in energy assistance to help state residents deal with utility bills during the rest of the summer. So far this year, Energy Outreach Colorado has provided a total of \$7.55 million in assistance. The funds will be distributed to 131 assistance organizations throughout the state at a time when many of them are running low on funds after helping households catch-up from the previous heating season.

### **Project Energy Savers**

- Project Energy Savers will begin printing personalized calendars that can carry your organization's name, telephone number and logo on September 4. The Project Energy Savers calendars contain energy saving and energy efficiency tips on each month. To see samples of the calendars visit the Project Energy Savers website at [www.projectenergysavers.com](http://www.projectenergysavers.com) <<http://www.projectenergysavers.com>> If you are interested in the personalized calendars, contact Charlie Earp at 202 333-5917.

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