

**A Message from Elder Services
Important Information about Heating Assistance**

The high costs of food, home heating fuel, utilities, and gasoline are stretching many people's budgets to the breaking point. This is especially true for those with limited incomes, and those on fixed budgets. No one should have to choose between heating their home or having enough to eat. As we all face the costs of heating our homes this winter, we wanted to provide you with the following information regarding local fuel assistance programs and services.

We hope you find this information helpful. If you have any questions, or would like additional information regarding fuel or food assistance, please give us a call. We're here to help.

*Robert P. Dean, Executive Director
Elder Services of Berkshire County, Inc.*

Local Fuel Assistance Programs

This article was excerpted from the website Massresources.org by Elder Services Information & Referral/Intake Specialists Simone Gaunt and Laura Feakes. For more information about fuel or food assistance, call Elder Services at 499-0524 or 1-800-544-5242.

Berkshire Community Action Council (BCAC): has a fuel assistance program that can help low-income people pay for their primary source of heat. This program helps to offset part of the cost of fuel and is available from November 1 through April 30. Renters whose heat is included in their rent may also be eligible. For income guidelines, and to apply for fuel assistance, call BCAC: 663-3014 (North County); 445-5671 (Central County); or 528-1947 (South County).

Citizens Energy Oil Program (Joe 4Oil): allows people who need help heating their homes to purchase a one-time delivery of up to 100 gallons of home heating home oil for half the retail price per gallon. This program covers oil purchases only and does not apply to burner primes or services. This program is available December through mid March. For income guidelines call: toll free 1-877-JOE-4-Oil /1-877-563-4645, or call BCAC.

Citizens Energy/Distrigas Heat Assistance Program gives a \$150 utility bill credit to eligible households who heat with natural gas. The program is run by Citizens Energy and funded by Distrigas. For income guidelines and to apply call 1-866-427-9918 or call BCAC at the numbers listed above.

The Center for Ecological Technology (CET) has a Heating Oil Co-Op that contracts with full service dealers to sell oil at a reduced rate off the market price for co-op members. Consumers who heat their homes, apartments or small businesses with oil can save a significant amount of money each heating season. The consumer must join the co-op at a cost of \$15 per household, \$25 per business and \$7 for students and low-

Western Mass Electric Company provides a 35% discount to consumers who are also eligible for AFDC, EAEDC, Food Stamps, SSI, Medicaid, Fuel Assistance and/or some VA benefit programs. Call WMECO to request an application: 1-800-286-2000.

Berkshire Gas Company offers reduced rates to low-income customers who receive public assistance benefits and meet income limits. Eligible customers get a 20% to 40% discount on their gas rates. Utility companies enroll eligible customers automatically, or customers can apply directly. Call Berkshire Gas Company for details: 1-800-292-5012.

The Salvation Army in Pittsfield and North Adams offers help with winter fuel expenses through their Good Neighbor Energy Fund. This fund helps people in need pay for their winter heating fuel and other energy bills. The fund is for families or individuals who are facing a short-term financial crisis and do not qualify for other fuel assistance programs. It is a joint effort between the gas and electric utility companies and the Salvation Army. Money for the fund comes from the utility companies, donations from utility customers and businesses and other charitable donors. It is available from December 1st until funds run out. For income guidelines and to apply, call the Salvation Army in Pittsfield: 442-0624 or in North Adams: 663-7987.

MassSave is an energy savings program for Massachusetts homeowners and renters. It offers energy tips and information about free home energy assessments, energy-saving products, and loans, rebates, and other incentives for energy-saving home improvements. To see which rebates, loans, home energy assessments, or other energy programs are available use their website MassSave.com or call 1-866-527-7283.

Heating Emergency Assistance Retrofit Task Weatherization Assistance Program (Heartwap): provides heating system repair and replacement services to low-income households. The program is administered by a network of local agencies, in most areas the same agency that administers the Fuel Assistance program. Interested customers should contact their local Fuel Assistance agency for application information.

Just a reminder...

Massachusetts laws prevent utility companies from shutting off service to people in special situations. Senior households, low-income families with infants, people with serious illnesses who cannot afford to pay their utility bills, tenants whose landlords are responsible for utility bills and low-income people who would be without heat during the winter are eligible for shutoff protection.

Please call Elder Services at 499-0524 to speak with someone about your options for receiving help with your heating bill – we're here to help.