



For Immediate Release
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“Cold Weather Rule,” energy assistance programs help keep consumers out of the cold

Assistance in paying for heat available for Minnesota consumers

(St. Paul) – With winter on the way Governor Tim Pawlenty today reminded Minnesotans that the state’s “Cold Weather Rule” opens for application on October 15th and lasts through the end of the home heating season on April 15th.

The Cold Weather Rule protects consumers from having their utility service shut off during the winter months. This and other programs are available to Minnesotans who need their heat reconnected or may have trouble paying their heating bills this winter.

"Minnesotans who cannot afford to pay [their home heating costs](#) should know that help [is available](#)," Governor Pawlenty [said](#). "Keeping families warm in winter is not just about comfort, it's about the health and safety of our citizens."

The **Cold Weather Rule** is administered by the Public Utilities Commission through local utility companies which are required to offer shut-off protection to households. While all households can apply, households with income less than 50 percent of the state median income (\$39,414 for a family of four) have the greatest number of payment options. Customers must apply to the utility company that provides their heat. There are special payment plans for households who need to reconnect their heat at the beginning of the heating season. Under the rule, customers must make and keep regular payment plans with their energy provider in exchange for keeping the heat on until April 15, 2007.

"Consumers who may need help keeping their heat on this winter should contact their utility before their heat is shut off," said Deborah Motz of the PUC's Consumer Affairs Office.

Most utilities offer bill payment options, including budget plans that help even out the payment amount of each month's energy bill. Customers receiving energy assistance do not have to show proof of income since they already meet the income qualifications. They simply need to contact the utility to sign up for a payment plan. Contact your utility company for more information

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The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) is federally funded through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and administered by the Minnesota Department of Commerce through 38 local service providers around the state. This program helps low-income customers pay their heating bills through grant money paid directly to the utility company on behalf of the customer.

The average grant per household is about \$500. Customers with less than 50 percent of the state median income (\$39,414 for a family of four) may qualify. Households with seniors, disabled, and children are especially encouraged to apply.

"If you think you qualify and have not yet applied, do so today," said John Harvanko, Energy Assistance Program director. "Funding is always limited and is administered on a first-come-first-serve basis."

The Weatherization Assistance Program is funded through the U.S. Department of Energy and administered by the Minnesota Department of Commerce. This program provides home energy conservation audits, safety inspections, and assessments of furnaces and indoor air quality for low-income households. People signing up for Energy Assistance are automatically eligible for the Weatherization Program as well. Minnesota homeowners or renters may apply.

The Energy Information Center, at the Minnesota Department of Commerce, provides a wide range of energy saving information that any homeowner can use to help control their heating costs. Energy saving recommendations include:

- Seal attic bypasses. The Attic Bypass Guide from the Energy Information Center will help you locate and fix leaks inside your home that allow heated air to escape into the attic.
- Turn down your thermostat to 65° while at home and 55° or 60° when away or asleep.
- Replace your old furnace with a new, efficient model. Look for the ENERGY STAR label on all new appliances.
- Replace or clean furnace filters monthly during the heating season.
- Place window film on the interior of the leakiest windows in your home.
- Install a carbon monoxide alarm.
- Call your utility about having a home energy audit and ask about a budget plan to spread out your heating costs.
- Keep radiators and duct registers clean.
- Call, write, or email for our Low Cost-No Cost Home Energy Guides that contain many ways to help control energy costs all year long.

For more information on energy efficiency, the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, or the Weatherization Assistance Program, contact the Minnesota Department of Commerce Energy Info Center:

- 651-296-5175 or toll free in Minnesota 1-800-657-3710
- Email: energy.info@state.mn.us
- On the web: www.commerce.state.mn.us Click on Energy Info Center

Other forms of assistance may be available through county social service programs, community based organizations and non-profit agencies such as Heat Share, administered by the Salvation Army.

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