Indiana County Community Action Program, Inc.

Telephone: 724-465-2657 ❖ Fax: 724-465-5118 ❖ E-mail: sdill@iccap.net

827 Water Street ❖ P.O. Box 187 ❖ Indiana, PA 15701

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Cold Weather and High Utility Bills

By Sandra Harber, Director of Community Services

Cold weather and high utility bills may spell disaster for many Indiana County residents this year. Fuel deliveries are costing between $100 and $150 *more* than they did at this same time last year, bringing the cost of minimum fuel deliveries to between $300 and $400. Many low-income county residents, particularly the elderly, may find themselves without heat.

The Energy Assistance Program of the Department of Public Welfare (LIHEAP) opened on November 7, 2005. Regular grants may be as much as $500 and Crisis grants are $300. At this time, many people have already used their LIHEAP benefits to pay for a delivery. Due to our harsh weather, that first delivery has now been exhausted. For those who have not yet applied, applications are available through the Department of Public Welfare at 2750 West Pike Road. Clients may also pick up applications at the ICCAP main office at 827 Water Street.

The Church Crisis Program funds are stretched to the limit. These funds are the result of collections made in many county churches. We have been unable to provide deliveries through this emergency program because of the increased costs this year; however, we have been able to help 32 families with twenty gallon kerosene vouchers.

We continue to process $1 Energy applications. We have completed applications for 39 families who have received an average grant of $312. $1 Energy grants are currently available to people whose utilities are either off or in danger of being shut off. Participating $1 Energy providers include Dominion Peoples Gas, Penelec, T.W. Phillips and Columbia Gas. All applicants for this program must have already applied for LIHEAP (Energy Assistance).

Many families awaiting ICCAP weatherization services are being helped to reduce their energy bills through the Governor's Stay Warm PA Program. Lowe's Home Improvement stores have donated 200 mini weatherization kits to Indiana County though our local United Way. ICCAP will be distributing the kits to those on the waiting lists for the ICCAP Weatherization Program. Governor Rendell is encouraging families to use these kits to develop a "warm room." Families can use the kits donated to insulate the doors and windows of a single room. They can block doorways with blankets and concentrate the heat in this room, keeping family members warm without the costs associated with heating a whole house.

Additional information about the Governor's energy plans can be found at http://www.staywarmpa.com/.

Hurricane Katrina

By Sandra Harber, Director of Community Services

Hurricane Katrina affected thousands of families in the Gulf region. We met several of these families and were able to help them through a variety of programs.

One family moved back into their family home in the Blairsville area; the home had been rented out. Upon their return, they found that the home needed new wiring in order to be safe. In addition to providing household and clothing items ranging from coats to blankets, we were able to raise funds for materials and locate volunteers to do the electrical work. The family told us how they had just forty-five minutes to evacuate before the storm hit. Their home had been destroyed; nothing had been left except the cement slab where it once stood. A neighbor just two houses away had died.

Another family told us about staying in the Houston Astrodome. Thinking they would be returning home in a day or so, they had only packed a single change of clothing. They came to us wearing sandals and shorts; we helped outfit them for the cold weather, provided household supplies and furniture, and even located a vehicle for them.

Helping the victims of Katrina was a true community effort. On October 13th, ICCAP participated in a collaborative meeting held by the Red Cross where participating agencies discussed ways to help. We had been contacted by seven families/individuals and were told there were an additional twelve families/individuals in the county. ICCAP, the Red Cross, and Catholic Charities agreed to refer victims for services to each other. Thanks to a "Katrina Tree" sponsored by the Indiana Mall, ICCAP was able to collect new and used household items and clothing. Through our own programs, we were able to help locate housing. We provided the first month's rent and security deposit for one family.

The Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency designated Community Action Programs as the lead agency in providing case management. A contract was signed on November 9 between ICCAP and the Pennsylvania Interim Sheltering Program so that we could provide case management and referrals for households located in the Commonwealth as a result of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

One victim said, "I don't know what we would have done without all the nice people at ICCAP."

REMEMBER ... ICCAP's 827 Water Street Office in Indiana has extended office hours until 7:00 p.m. *every* Tuesday evening for clients who cannot schedule appointments between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.

Check out these ENERGY SAVINGS TIPS!

"No Cost" Energy Savings Tips

- Lower thermostat between 68/72 degrees. Each degree less saves 1-2% of fuel cost.
- Close the registers or turn down thermostats in rooms that are not being used. This could save you up to $100.00 a year.
- Repair any water leaks. Thirty drops of water per minute add up to 60 gallons of water per month. If the leak is on the hot water side, that is an additional 60 gallons of water that must be heated.
- If you have an unused fireplace, ensure that the damper is closed, or better yet seal it off. If the damper is open, warm air is continuously escaping up the chimney. As the warm air escapes, it will be replaced with colder outside air that must be heated to maintain room temperature.
- Use the sun to heat your house. On sunny days, open the curtains on the sunny side of the house. Close curtains at night. Use heavy or insulated curtains. This may save you around $25.00 a year.
- Keep your refrigerator temperature between 37- 40 degrees. Freezer should be 0-5 degrees.
- Turn off any unused lights, TV's, computers, etc.
- Air conditioners: set thermostat 78 degrees or higher. You can save 3-5% on your a/c cost for each degree you raise the thermostat.
- Ensure that your storm doors seal tight and that storm windows are closed properly.
- Latch the primary windows to make a tighter seal.
- Dress warmer in the winter - wear sweaters and shoes or slippers around the house.
- Dress cooler in the summer - wear lighter clothes.
- Dry clothes on the clothesline whenever possible. When using the dryer, dry full loads only and remember to clean the lint screens after each load.
- Cover pots and pans with lids to cut cooking time. Bake several meals at one time and turn burner/oven off 5-10 minutes before food is done (food will continue to cook).
- Place a rolled towel or rug along the bottom of the doors and window sills to help keep the air out.

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"Low Cost" Energy Savings Tips

- Faucet Aerators: If your water faucets do not have low-flow aerators, installing these on the faucet can save you approx. 25-30% of water use at that particular faucet. Cost: $1.00-$2.00 each.

- Low-flow shower head: a typical shower head uses 7-10 gals of water a minute. A low-flow shower head uses 2-3 gallons a minute thus saving 5-7 gallons of water per minute, per shower. Three people taking a 5 minute shower each day could save between 75-105 gallons per day! Cost: $3.00-$6.00 each.

- Furnace filter: changing your furnace filter monthly can save wear and tear on the furnace and help cut your fuel costs by up to 5%.
  Cost: $1.00-$2.00 each.

- Compact Fluorescent Light bulbs (CFL's): CFL's use only 25% of the energy as a regular incandescent light bulb. Every light bulb you replace with a CFL's will cut the usage of that light by 75%. It's estimated that the average household can save around $80.00 per year in electric by changing to CFL's. Hint: To get the biggest savings, only change out the bulbs that are on more than 3-4 hours per day. (CFL's also last longer, cutting down on buying more bulbs.) Cost: $3.00-$7.00

- Seal heating ducts: leaking heating ducts, whether on the supply side or return side, is one of the most wasteful parts of a furnace. Duct work should be sealed at each joint to insure proper air flow to each room. By sealing the ducts you may cut up to 50-60% of heat loss through the ducts. Savings could be up to 30% of your heating bill. Cost: $5.00-$10.00 dollars, depending on amount of and type of tape that is used.

- Door kits: install air-sealing kits around any door leading to the outside or non-heated space. These kits will cut down cold air coming into your home from around your doors, making the living spaces more comfortable. With this you may be able to lower your thermostat a couple of degrees saving around 4-6% on your fuel bill. Cost: $10.00-$12.00 each.

- Repair/replace broken window glass: if any of your window pane glass is cracked or broken, allowing cold air to come into the home, by replacing or taping over the crack will make that room more comfortable. With this, you may be able to lower your thermostat a few degrees, saving about 4-6% on your fuel bill. Cost: $10.00-$15.00 or more, depending on size.

- Use a 100% silicone caulk: to seal any seams, cracks or openings to the outside. You can save up to 10% of your energy bill by reducing the air leaks into your home. Cost: $2.50-$4.00 per tube.

- Set water heater to 110/115 degrees: wrap your old, inefficient water heater with an insulation blanket. This could save you about $20.00 a year. Cost: $10.00-$15.00.

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"High Cost" Energy Savings Tips

- Wall and attic insulation are probably the most energy saving investments you can make. If your home has no attic insulation, you need to install up to12 inches of fiberglass or cellulose insulation. This could save you around $300.00 per year on your heating bill. You could possibly save this much or more by having your outside walls insulated. Cost: $1.00-$2.00 per square foot of contractor installed insulation.

- If your basement is unheated, insulating the floor joists with fiberglass may save you up to $160.00 a year in energy. Cost: $1.00-$2.00 per square foot of contractor installed insulation.

- Install programmable thermostats. When used properly, these thermostats could save you around $100.00 per year. Cost: $40.00-$80.00 each.

- Replace old windows with new double-pane, ENERGY STAR qualified windows. By installing new windows in your home, you may save $300.00 – 500.00 per year on your heat bill. Cost: $100.00-$300.00 per window, depending on window size and contractor fees.

- When buying new appliances, select the most energy efficient model you can find in the size that you need. You can save approximately $80.00 a year using ENERGY STAR appliances.

Please note that savings are estimates. Your actual savings may vary depending on use, your original energy consumption, and quality of materials and installation.

Additional fees may be added if having a contractor install these materials. Costs of materials are averages for our local area. Your actual costs may vary.

CANDIDS Snapshots

Help raise money for Habitat for Humanity of Indiana County by RECYCLING!

Here's how it works…

- *Collect empty inkjets, laser cartridges & used cell phones!*
- *Promote the program by spreading the word to friends, family & local businesses!*

- *Check your items' value on the "Complete Buy-back List" at www.usrecycleink.com.*

Habitat for Humanity's office is located at ICCAP, 827 Water Street, Indiana, PA.