

Energy Assistance Programs for Seniors & Low Income Individuals

Winter is officially here and your heating and electric bills are on the rise. The best thing you can do is make your home as energy efficient as possible. But even purchasing a programmable thermostat or placing plastic around drafty windows may not keep the cost down enough. So what can customers who have problems paying utility bill do? There are a number of energy assistance programs that may have funding available to help.

1. **Budget Billing** - Investigate options such as utility budget billing plans. With this plan you pay the same amount year round so in the summer you are building a savings for your higher winter bill. Call your utility company for more information about this plan.
2. **Winter Protection Plan** – This plan protects senior and low income customers from shut-off and high utility payments between November 1 and March 31. The plan allows eligible customers to make monthly payments of at least 7% of their estimated annual bill November through March and catch up on the money owed between April and November. Call your utility company for more information.
3. **Home Heating Credit** – In order to find out if one is eligible for this credit, obtain the booklet titled, “2008 Michigan 1040CR-7 Home Heating Credit Claim.” The filing deadline is September 30, 2009.
4. **Weatherization Assistance Program** – This program provides free weatherization services for the homes of low income owners and renters. The services could lower your heating cost by as much as 20 to 25%. Please contact your local Community Action Agency for information about this program.
5. **Military Shut-off Protection** – A customer or the spouse of a customer on active duty with the military may apply for shut-off protection for electric and natural gas service. The shut-off protection can be provided for up to 90 days and may be extended. The customer is required to pay the balance after the 90 days or when the extension is over.
6. **State Emergency Relief Program** – This program may help pay for part of your utility bill and help keep your utilities from being turned off. Contact your local Department of Human Services for more information.

Please remember that the best thing you can do is make your home as energy efficient as possible. Doing even one of the following can make a difference in your utility bills. Caulk and weather-strip windows and doors, dial down the thermostat, clear or replace your furnace filter once a month, and install compact fluorescent light bulbs. For more information on the programs and plans listed above, please call Region VII Area Agency on Aging at 1-800-858-1637.

For further information about services, contact Region VII Area Agency on Aging, 1615 S. Euclid Ave., Bay City 1-800-858-1637 www.region7aaa.org