
Utilities Assistance

CONNECTICUT ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Program Description:

This program is designed to assist low-income households pay their winter heating bills. The program makes vendor payments for those homeowners and renters who are responsible for their heating bills. Renters whose heat is included in their rent and pay more than 30% of their income towards rent are eligible for a cash benefit. Benefits are based on income and household size.

Eligibility Requirements:

Households must be at or below 150% of the federal poverty level. In 2000 a single person must earn \$12,360 or less while a household of two must earn \$16,590 or less. There is a liquid assets test for the program. Liquid assets in excess of \$10,000 for homeowners and \$7,000 for all other households will be counted toward the household's annual income.

For More Information Contact:

The application period for this program begins mid-October and runs through March 31. Households may apply at their nearest Community Action Agency (**see Community Action Agency** in this Manual for locations).

For information regarding the program or the location of the nearest intake site, call the DSS, Energy Services Unit at 1-800-842-1132.

RIGHT TO UTILITY AND DELIVERABLE FUEL SERVICES

Program Description:

Electric and gas utility companies are limited in their ability to shut-off or refuse to provide utility services. Customers are entitled to written advance notice of a threatened shut-off. There are limitations as to the day and time energy may be shut off and service may not be shut off (or if shut off, must be reinstated) whenever the lack of services is life threatening. Deliverable fuels (energy services such as oil, propane, coal and wood) have fewer limitations affecting shut-offs or refusals to deliver services, but there are usually competing deliverable fuel companies that can provide services. During the winter, limited energy assistance is available to help meet heating bills from utility or deliverable fuel companies, or to assist in payment of rent if heat is included in the rent payment.

Security Deposits to Obtain Service

Connecticut Light & Power, United Illuminating, Yankee Gas, Southern Connecticut Gas, and Connecticut Natural Gas cannot charge low income customers security deposits. Municipal utilities can charge security deposits, but the Connecticut Department of Social Services can help pay these deposits for recipients of State Supplement or TFA.

Utility Service Terminations and Reinstatement

Life Threatening Service Terminations

Gas and electric utility services may not be terminated or must be reinstated if terminated, if a lack of utility service would create a life threatening situation and the customer lacks the resources to pay the entire account and has certified physician's note.

Service Terminations Between November 1 and April 15

Electric companies cannot terminate service to "hardship" cases. Hardship cases include customers:

- receiving public assistance
- whose sole source of income is Social Security, Veteran's or Unemployment Compensation benefits
- whose income is less than 125% of the poverty level
- who are unemployed with a household income less than 300% of the federal poverty level
- with a seriously ill household member and
- those whose circumstances threaten a deprivation of necessities if payment of the delinquent bill is required.

Gas companies can terminate hardship customers who do not use gas for heat. However, they may not terminate gas heat customers who are hardship households.

Reinstatement of Service Between November 1 and April 15

Electric companies must reinstate services to hardship households without requiring any payment.

Gas companies must reinstate service to hardship households. However, reinstatement of gas company service is not required for customers whose heat:

- was shut off between April 16 and October 31 and
- whose gas service was maintained the previous winter because they were a hardship customer and have not paid the lessor of:
 - a) 20% of the balance owed when service was shut off
 - b) \$100 or
 - c) the minimum payment due under the customer's amortization plan.

Service Terminations Between April 16 and October 31

Gas and electric services can be terminated for nonpayment of a bill between April 16 and October 31, except where the termination is life threatening. Service may be terminated even if the customer is a "hardship" case.

Avoiding Terminations of Service or Getting Service Reinstated

It is best to avoid a termination of service by making a payment arrangement since avoiding a termination is much easier than trying to get service reinstated. All customers are entitled to a reasonable payment agreement to maintain utility service. Payment agreements that a household cannot keep should never be made.

The usual steps in making a payment agreement are as follows. Written termination notice received from utility: contact company and try to make an affordable payment agreement. If unsuccessful, ask that a "company review officer" review the request for affordable payment agreement and provide the customer with a written decision. Payment arrangement can be made if it has not been defaulted in the last 12 months. If unsuccessful, call the Connecticut Department of Public Utility Control (DPUC) which can often mediate an agreement. Details of the procedure that should be followed when arranging a payment procedure are included in the legal services booklet "How to Keep Year `Round Utility Service," referred to below.

Yankee Gas, Southern Connecticut Gas, and Connecticut Natural Gas (CNG) have arrearage forgiveness payment programs for low-income households that heat with gas and receive energy assistance or help from a fuel bank. In exchange for regular payments of an agreed upon amount, an amount matching the customer payments and energy assistance is "forgiven" from the customer's debt, effectively doubling all payments. CNG also includes non-heating customers in its arrearage forgiveness program.

Energy Assistance and Fuel Banks

Limited energy assistance may be applied for between November 1 and the middle of March at local Community Action Agencies. Benefits are for heat expenses, or to assist with the rent when heat costs are included in the rent. These benefits must be taken into account, to reduce the amount a household must pay in a payment agreement with a utility company. (See **Connecticut Energy Assistance Program** and **State Appropriated Fuel Assistance Program** in this Manual for more information on Fuel Assistance)

Other Utility and Energy Problems

Customers may disagree that they owe a bill, or a landlord may terminate service or try to put the landlord's bill in a tenant's name. These and other common problems along with rights and obligations of consumers and procedures for solving problems are discussed in detail in booklets available from legal services offices.

For More Information Contact:

Connecticut Department of Public Utility Control
10 Franklin Square
New Britain, CT 06051
Phone: (800) 382-4586

Statewide Legal Services at (860) 344-0380 or (800) 453-3320, or the local legal services office to request the following booklets:

- How to Keep Year `Round Utility Service
- Rights of Utility Customers
- Energy and Utility Problems with Landlords
- Energy Assistance Information

Some communities have fuel banks that will assist low-income persons with meeting various utility or fuel bills. Contact **Info-line** at (800) 203-1234 for a local application site.

STATE APPROPRIATED FUEL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Program Description:

This program is designed to assist low-income households pay their winter heating bills. Households must have an elderly (60 or older) or disabled member in the household and be responsible for the payment of their heating bills. In 2000 a single person must earn \$16,480 or less while a household of two must earn \$22,120 or less. There are no benefits available for those households whose heat is included in their rent.

Eligibility Requirements:

Households must have an elderly (60 or older) or disabled member with income between 150% - 200% of the federal poverty level. There is a liquid assets test for the program. Liquid assets in excess of \$10,000 for homeowners and \$7,000 for all other households will be counted toward the household's annual income.

For More Information:

The application period for this program begins mid-October and runs through March 31. Households may apply at their nearest Community Action Agency (see **Community Action Agency** in this Manual for locations).

For information regarding the program or the location of the nearest intake site, call the DSS, Energy Services Unit at 1-800-842-1132.

WEATHERIZATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Program Description:

This program is designed to provide energy conservation measures to low-income households to improve the energy efficiency of their homes while ensuring their health and safety. Priority is given to households with an elderly (60 or older) or disabled member, or with a child under the age of six.

Eligibility Requirements:

Households must be at or below 150% of the federal poverty level. In 2000 a single person must earn \$12,360 or less while a household of two must earn \$16,590 or less. There is a liquid assets test for the program. Liquid assets in excess of \$10,000 for homeowners and \$7,000 for all other households will be counted toward the household's annual income.

For More Information:

The application period for this program begins mid-October and runs through March 31. Households may apply at their nearest intake site, call the DSS, Energy Services Unit at 1-800-842-1132.