

**Rutland Herald**

This is a printer friendly version of an article from [www.rutlandherald.com](http://www.rutlandherald.com)

To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Back](#)

---

Article published Nov 30, 2008

## State fuel assistance demand up

By [Bruce Edwards](#) Staff Writer

The price of home heating has come down from its highs of just a few months ago but low-income advocates say the demand for fuel assistance is on a record pace.

Richard Moffi, who administers the state's Seasonal Fuel Assistance Program (LIHEAP), said applications this year are already up 26 percent to 27 percent over the same time last year.

"The driver this past summer and fall were high fuel prices and even though prices have come down, they're still unaffordable for low-income folks," Moffi said.

He said the combination of high heating oil prices and an economy in free-fall has made it tough on Vermonters to pay their heating bills and stay on top of everything else.

Moffi said the Agency of Human Services has so far received 32,860 applications this year compared to 32,790 applications for all of last heating season. About two-thirds of the applications are approved with the remainder rejected because the applicants don't fall within income guidelines, he said.

He said the state will receive \$35.5 million in federal LIHEAP funds. Those funds are allocated for seasonal and crisis fuel assistance.

Moffi said the five community action agencies around the state have kicked off their crisis fuel assistance programs.

Crisis fuel assistance is a program of last resort for homeowners and renters who have run out of seasonal fuel assistance or don't qualify because they make too much money.

The state has already sent out 13,600 seasonal fuel assistance checks that average \$1,729. Last year the average benefit was \$1,362. The money can be used for a variety of home heating sources, including coal.

Moffi said the demand for crisis fuel assistance applications to the five Community Action Agencies around the state also has jumped dramatically.

"Three years ago the five community action agencies served a total of 4,000 households, two years ago it was 5,000 households, last year it was 6,151 households," he said.

Moffi said he wouldn't be surprised if the total number of households jumped to more than 7,000 this heating season.

Crisis fuel assistance provides delivery of 100 to 125 gallons of home heating oil.

Moffi urged anyone who needs crisis fuel assistance to apply well before their oil tank runs dry. He said waiting until the oil tank is empty increases the cost for a special delivery and running a heating system when the tank is dry can damage the system.

He said vulnerable Vermonters, those with disabilities and the head of household age 60 and over, can apply for crisis fuel assistance over the phone.

The state's community action agencies began taking crisis fuel assistance applications last week.

Hal Cohen, executive director of the Central Vermont Community Action Council, said "there were people waiting outside our door in the morning lined up before our doors opened."

Cohen said tough economic times and higher fuel prices account for the increased demand.

"We also, according to my staff, we're seeing a lot of new people, people who have never come for assistance before," said Cohen who oversees four offices in central Vermont. "We're seeing a lot of people over income and not eligible for the LIHEAP (seasonal) program."

He said another indication of the poor economy has been a 93 percent increase in the number of people using the low-income agency's food shelf.

At BROCC - Community Action Agency in Southwestern Vermont, there was a nearly identical scene in Rutland and Bennington last week.

"We've been jam-packed in both offices with people seeking crisis fuel help," said Elizabeth Eddy, BROCC community services and outreach program manager.

BROC and the other community action agencies around the state also assist clients in facilitating the seasonal fuel assistance application process and also help expedite fuel deliveries.

The Central Vermont Public Service Corp., Shareheat program is also administered locally by BROC.

In addition to providing emergency fuel, Shareheat funds can also be used for deposits on fuel tanks and for minor repairs to a heating system.

CVPS is one of a number of private sector entities that assist Vermonters with their home heating needs.

The Shareheat program has \$187,000 in pledged matching funds - \$100,000 from CVPS and \$87,000 from 11 other companies, said CVPS spokesman Steve Costello. In addition, he said private donations used to match corporate matching funds now total \$75,000.

"This will go a long way toward ensuring no one goes cold," Costello said.

Money raised is administered by the community action agencies within the CVPS service territory.

The Vermont Fuel Dealers Association has its own assistance program called Neighbor-In-Need. The program will provide more than 4,000 gallons of heating oil to needy Vermonters.

The Concord Group of Insurance Companies has set aside \$500,000 its "A Warm Hand: Policyholder Heating Lottery" program. The one-time program will assist some of its policyholders throughout New England. Approximately 360 of the company's 16,000 clients in Vermont will receive a \$250 voucher for fuel.

For fuel assistance information call: (800) 479-6151 or [dcf.vermont.gov/esd/fuel\\_assistance/crisis\\_assistance](http://dcf.vermont.gov/esd/fuel_assistance/crisis_assistance).

Contact Bruce Edwards at [bruce.edwards@rutlandherald.com](mailto:bruce.edwards@rutlandherald.com).

---