



Stay Connected Information Update

Since the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) created the Stay Connected video, some modifications have been made to the eligibility requirements and the application process for some utility assistance programs. The changes are beneficial to residential consumers and will provide assistance to a greater number of people this winter heating season. The OCC hopes that community action and other service agencies continue to use the video to help potential customers better understand the application process for the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP), Emergency-HEAP (E-HEAP), Percentage of Income Payment Plan (PIPP) and Lifeline.

The following is a summary of the recent guideline changes and clarification of some of the information contained within the Stay Connected video. It is important to note that the video provides a general overview of the available utility assistance programs. The OCC's Stay Connected fact sheets on HEAP, E-HEAP PIPP and Lifeline also should be distributed to customers so that they have more detailed information to review prior to signing up for the programs. All of our fact sheets are available by calling toll free 1-877-PICKOCC (1-877-742-5622) or visiting the OCC website at www.pickocc.org and clicking on the Stay Connected logo on the home page.

- ⇒ Due to Governor Taft releasing funds from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Fund, the income guidelines for HEAP and E-HEAP now make households that are at or below 175 percent of the federal income guidelines eligible for the programs.
- ⇒ Through the Winter Reconnect Order issued by the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio on September 7, consumers who use E-HEAP to pay the \$175 to get reconnected no longer have to enroll in PIPP. They are required to sign up

for an extended payment option that could include PIPP, the 1/3 payment plan and/or the 1/6 payment plan.

- ⇒ Although the guidelines state that the first PIPP payment is usually due when the customer signs up for the plan, consumers are not required to give any money directly to the community action agency. The payment may be made through a commitment by the community action agency or be billed to the consumer.



- ⇒ In most cases customers must sign up for HEAP by March 31. However, there have been instances when the Ohio Department of Development (ODOD) has extended the deadline into May. As the earlier deadline approaches, consumers should contact ODOD at 1-800-282-0880 or check with their community action agency to see if the deadline has been extended.

- ⇒ Here is a list of all the fuel types that are covered through low-income assistance programs:

- ◆ Natural gas
- ◆ Bottled gas or propane (Liquid Propane gas)
- ◆ Fuel oil or kerosene
- ◆ Coal or wood or pellets
- ◆ Electric

Consumers who would like more information about HEAP, E-HEAP or PIPP can contact any of the following agencies:

- ⇒ Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel – 1-877-742-5622 (Lifeline information also available)
- ⇒ Ohio Department of Development – 1-800-282-0880
- ⇒ Community action agency

For additional information from the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel:

Call: 1-877-PICKOCC (1-877-742-5622) toll free or (614) 466-8574
Write: 10 West Broad Street, 18th Floor, Columbus, Ohio 43215-3485
E-mail: occ@occ.state.oh.us • Internet Address: www.pickocc.org