

Cold Weather Rule protections end April 15, Energy Assistance Program funds are still available

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As Minnesota's Cold Weather Rule, administered by the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, ends – the PUC and the Minnesota Department of Commerce urge consumers to act immediately to keep the heat on.

Minnesotans know that cold spring days may continue, requiring many households to keep their heat running. For families struggling to make ends meet, the need for heat is an additional cost many households will not be able to bear. Additionally, Minnesota utility customers who utilize the Cold Weather Rule must act now in order to maintain their service. To help, most utilities offer bill payment options, including budget plans that help even out the payment amounts over several months. Customers should contact their utility company for more information. The good news is the Commerce Department's Energy Assistance Program (EAP) has money available and is still accepting applications to help low-income customers pay their energy bills.

"As cold weather continues this April, Minnesota families with children, seniors and veterans should still apply for Energy Assistance to help pay their energy bills to ensure they are not left out in the cold," said Commerce Commissioner Mike Rothman. "This time of year usually brings some sunshine and warm weather, but cold weather has prevailed over our hopes for a warm spring."

The average grant per household is about \$500. Customers with incomes less than 50 percent of the state median income (\$42,789 for a family of four) may qualify. Households with seniors, people with disabilities, and children are especially encouraged to apply. People have until the program year ends May 31 to apply, however households are served on a first-come-first-serve basis while funds last.

Households can only be served once per EAP program year; therefore, households who have already been served by EAP this program year (October 1, 2012 to May 31, 2013) are not eligible for the primary grant. However additional benefits may be available for households previously served by EAP if they are facing an emergency like a no heat situation.

EAP pays directly to the utility company on behalf eligible households. Households apply for EAP through 34 local service providers. Qualifying families must apply for assistance at the local service provider in their area. A list of local service providers and more information about the Minnesota Energy Assistance Program can be found at <http://mn.gov/commerce/energy/consumers/Heating-Assistance/> or by calling 1-800-657-3710.

EAP is federally funded through the U.S. Department of Health and Human and administered by the Minnesota Department of Commerce.