



KNOW YOUR FLORIDA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

Matthew M. Carter II, Commissioner

LOW-INCOME HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (LIHEAP)

The rising cost of energy impacts us all, and we sometimes struggle to pay for what has become a basic service to sustain life, most especially in the extreme cold of winter or the extreme heat of summer. However, for many of us, this obstacle of meeting our monthly energy costs can seem insurmountable. An important mission of the Florida Public Service Commission (PSC) is to inform those who need it that assistance is available in this state through local governments and community organizations to help pay energy bills.

The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) assists households that have incomes below 150% of the federal poverty level and that need assistance in order to pay their electric bills. Households may receive up to one LIHEAP crisis benefit payment during the heating season (October to March), and a second crisis payment during the cooling season (April to September). In addition, households may receive one non-emergency payment per year. Usually, more than 80,000 households per year receive LIHEAP assistance in Florida. Priority in services is given to households with children and elderly or disabled members.

You may apply for LIHEAP through the agency that administers the LIHEAP program in your area. There are about three dozen of these agencies in Florida consisting of community action agencies, local governments, and various nonprofit organizations. Several places that you may call to identify the agency that services your area are your local power company; your local government information number; local referral agencies such as Area Agencies on

Aging, community action agencies, United Way and counseling and referral services (such as 2-1-1); and the Florida Public Service Commission's toll-free consumer information number, 1-800-342-3552. Additional information may be found on-line at www.floridacommunitydevelopment.org; <http://elderaffairs.state.fl.us>; or www.floridaelderresource.com.

While this assistance is available to help meet energy costs at the most critical times, there are actions you can take to reduce your bill and reduce your chances of needing the assistance. Here are a few ways you and your family can save energy:

- ◆ Set your thermostat comfortably low in the winter and comfortably high in the summer. Install a programmable thermostat that is compatible with your heating and cooling system.
- ◆ Turn off all lights when you leave a room or when they are not in use.
- ◆ Avoid using hot water for washing clothes. Washing with cold or warm temperatures works well with today's detergents.
- ◆ Clean the lint filter in your dryer after each use and clean the exhaust hose periodically. This allows the air to circulate efficiently and helps eliminate fire hazards.
- ◆ Weatherize doors and windows and seal unused doors. Savings in annual energy use could amount to 10 percent or more.
- ◆ Close the damper when your fireplace is not in use. An open damper in a 48-inch square fireplace can let up to eight percent of your heat escape out of the chimney.
- ◆ Ceiling fans should turn clockwise in the summer and counterclockwise in the winter. Reversing the direction of the blades pushes warm air down into the room.
- ◆ Schedule a free or low-cost home energy audit by calling your utility's customer service department.
- ◆ Cover pans when cooking to reduce the amount of heat needed and the cooking time.
- ◆ Select a heating system that is properly sized for your house.

Although some of the options listed above may not apply to you depending on your dwelling's design or on your financial situation, several apply to everyone. I urge you to do what you can to conserve, both for your own financial interest and for the greater public interest.

For more information, you may call the PSC at **1-800-342-3552**, and request a copy of our *Conserve Your World* brochure which outlines some helpful ways to save and gives examples of things that can cause a high electric bill. Also, our *Where To Find Help* publication provides an overview of the PSC and an explanation of how consumers can be assisted with their utility-related complaints. This publication also includes general information about the state's electric and gas utilities and some helpful conservation tips. For more information, you may also contact us via Internet e-mail at contact@psc.state.fl.us, or at the PSC Web site at www.floridapsc.com.