PIEDMONT NATURAL GAS (PNG) COMPANY'S SHARE THE WARMTH

EP-921 – Piedmont Natural Gas (PNG) Company's Share the Warmth
Change #2-2009
October 1, 2009

921.01 GENERAL INFORMATION

A. Share the Warmth is funded 100% from monies contributed by Piedmont Natural Gas (PNG) customers and employees, as well as corporate donations. Allocations are made **only** to counties that have PNG residential customers. (See Figure 921-1.) Allocations are based on the number of PNG residential customers in each county. Counties can utilize Share the Warmth funds until exhausted or until the end of the heating season.

The following sections of the Energy Manual also apply to Share the Warmth

1. Notice Requirements - See Section EP-600.
2. Sub-contracting – See Section EP-910.
3. Vendor Agreement – See Section EP-910.
4. Appeals – See Section EP-700.
5. Hearing Process – See Section EP-700.
6. Overpayments and Fraud – See Section EP-810.
7. Lost, Stolen, or Forged Checks – See Section EP-500.
8. Retention - See Section EP-820.

B. Explore the possibility of a Share the Warmth payment prior to providing Crisis Intervention Program (CIP) assistance. In order to receive CIP funds, a household must be unable to obtain timely or appropriate assistance from other sources.

NOTE: **Native Americans in Hoke, Robeson, and Scotland Counties who apply for the program and are eligible may receive Share the Warmth benefits.**

C. Households do not have to heat with natural gas to be eligible. The temperature outside does not determine crisis situations. Households may receive Share the Warmth funds for all types of fuel used.

921.02 ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

A. Counties must begin taking applications when their Share the Warmth allocation is received. (See 921.04 below.)

B. A household does not have to be a PNG customer, but must be a residential utility customer. Accept the applicant's statement, unless questionable. If questionable, view a current service bill or telephone your local company to verify that the household is a residential customer.

C. A household must be experiencing a heating related crisis. Refer to 921.05 below for guidelines on how to assess whether a crisis exists.

D. A household must have countable net income at or below 150% of the current poverty level. (See 920.06 below.)

E. Assistance must be authorized within 18 to 48 hours.

F. Benefits cannot exceed $100 per application and $200 per calendar year.

G. There must be a signed agreement with each vendor who receives a Share the Warmth payment. (See 921.03 below.)

921.03 VENDOR AGREEMENT (See Section 910 on Contracting.)

The purpose of a vendor agreement is to ensure that the vendor does **not** treat recipients adversely.

County Responsibility For Negotiating Vendor Agreements

When the county department chooses to make a voucher or vendor payment or issue a two-party check, there must be an agreement with the vendor. In some instances, the payment will be to a landlord which makes him an energy supplier; therefore, a vendor agreement is required.

A. If a vendor agreement is **open-ended**, it is **not** necessary to re-negotiate it each year. To ensure that applicants receive benefits without delay, you should negotiate vendor agreements at the time you become aware of a new vendor.

B. Always use the DSS-8163. Retain the original and provide a copy to the vendor.

C. If the DSS-8163 is returned and the vendor has changed any wording, the DSS-8163 is void. You must negotiate a new DSS-8163.

921.04 APPLICATION PROCESS

Everyone who wishes to apply must be given the opportunity to apply without delay. The applicant must be allowed to sign an application, DSS-8178, on the day he:

- Appears at the county department of social services; **or**
- Appears at an agency that is taking applications per the county's plan. (See EP-200.)

A. Acceptance Of Application

Application taking must begin on the first working day the Share the Warmth allocation is received, and continue until the Share the Warmth allocation is exhausted or until the end of the current State fiscal year, whichever occurs first.

1. The applicant or his representative must apply for Share the Warmth in the county in which the household resides. The applicant must be a resident of North Carolina.

2. When you receive a request for assistance by mail or telephone and a crisis is indicated, follow up within one work day to schedule an interview. If the request is made by an individual who would have difficulty coming to a county department of social services or outpost office, obtain the information for the application by telephone. (See Section EP-300 for more information regarding telephone interviews.) Mail the person an application to sign. If a life-threatening situation exists, a home visit to obtain the needed information may be necessary if the information can not be obtained by some other means.

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3. If the applicant or his representative decides not to apply, complete the inquiry. Include as much information about the situation as possible.

4. You must research your county files to determine if anyone listed on the DSS-8178 has previously received Share the Warmth funds.

B. Who must be included In the application?

The same rules apply as those in LIEAP. See Section 310 for instructions on who must be included.

C. Explanation Of Rights and Responsibilities

1. Explain to the applicant he has the right to:

   a. Receive assistance if found eligible.

   b. Have any person participate in the interview for determination of eligibility.

   c. Be protected against discrimination on the grounds of race, creed, or national origin by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. He may appeal such discrimination through Section 504 of the Disability Act.

   d. Have any information given to the agency kept in confidence.

   e. Appeal if:

      (1) He was denied the right to apply for assistance on the same day he or his representative went to the county department of social services;

      (2) His application was denied;

      (3) His assistance was incorrect based on the county's interpretation of State regulations; **or**

      (4) A decision is not made on his application within 18 to 48 hours.

   f. Reapply at anytime.

   g. Withdraw from the assistance program at anytime.

2. Explain to the applicant he has the responsibility to:

   a. Provide the county department of social services the necessary information which can be used to locate and obtain information needed to determine eligibility; **and**

   b. Report immediately to the county department of social services the receipt of benefits, which he knows to be erroneous. If he does not report such incorrect payments, he may be required to repay any overpayment.

3. Explain the meaning of fraud to the applicant.

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D. Completion Of the DSS-8178 During the Application Interview

1. Document the applicant's responses to the questions on the DSS-8178.

2. As part of the interview process, determine what other services may be appropriate to meet the crisis. Document on the DSS-8178 which services were provided.

3. The applicant must sign the DSS-8178.

E. Eligibility Determination

When you complete the interview, verify all necessary factors of eligibility to determine if the household is eligible.

The household must meet the following eligibility criteria in order to be eligible for Share the Warmth:

1. Income

   Household meets income eligibility if the total household's members' countable income is equal to or less than 150% of the current poverty level. Use the chart in Section 900 of the Energy Manual to determine income limits, countable and excluded income, and income deductions.

   To determine income eligibility, use actual income received (and anticipated to be received) in the month of application. Do not convert.

2. A crisis situation must exist. See 921.05 below.

   However, the temperature outside does not determine whether a crisis exists.

   Document eligibility verification on the DSS-8178.

   Receipt of Share the Warmth benefits does not effect a household's eligibility for LIEAP, CIP, Emergency Assistance, etc.

921.05 CRISIS DETERMINATION AND DOCUMENTATION

A household is in a crisis if it is experiencing or is in danger of experiencing a life-threatening or health-related emergency and sufficient, timely, and appropriate assistance is not available from any other source.

NOTE: The temperature outside is not the sole determining factor for a crisis.

A. Crisis Determination

1. Guidelines For Determining If a Crisis Exists

   The following guidelines are considered to support a decision that a crisis exists.

   If the answer to all the questions below is No, the applicant is not experiencing a crisis.

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If the answer to one or more questions is Yes, it may be determined that a crisis exists. Counties must use prudent judgement. This is not an **all-**inclusive list

Consider the following guidelines to determine if a crisis exists.

a. Has the family experienced an event beyond its control?

(1) The household is experiencing unusual and/or unexpected expenses; **or**

(2) There is a decrease in the household's income.

NOTE: If there is no unusual and/or unexpected expense, decrease in the client's income, or if the client has misspent his income, the household may still be considered to be in a crisis situation if the answer to "b." is Yes.

b. Is there no source of heating, or is the source of heating in jeopardy? or

(1) The fuel supply is exhausted or terminated;

(2) The notice has been received notifying the household of termination of the heating source; **or**

(3) The heating source is in need of repair.

c. Once you determine a crisis exists, you must still determine if payment is needed to meet the crisis, or is there some other way to alleviate the situation?

(1) Does the applicant have sufficient resources, such as a savings or checking account to alleviate the crisis himself? Explore whether other family members may be able to offer assistance or support; **or**

(2) Explore with the applicant whether he or a member of the household will have income that can be used to meet the emergency. For example, the applicant has a cutoff notice for electricity but has ten days to pay the bill. In the interview, you determine that the applicant will begin receiving unemployment insurance in five days.

(3) Decide whether there are other community resources that can be used to alleviate the crisis.

(4) Will the fuel supplier agree to continue service until the applicant receives his next check?

(5) Explore if the applicant has a history of being in a crisis situation. If so, it is preferable to use other resources to assist in alleviating the situation. To maximize the $200 limitation in Share the Warmth, explore other resources to assist in alleviating the situation.

2. Verification and Documentation

a. Verify that a crisis exists by either:

(1) Accepting the applicant's statement, unless questionable;

(2) Viewing bills; **or**

(3) Contacting collaterals, such as neighbors, vendors, landlords, etc.

b. Documentation should include but not be limited to:

(1) Date of application;

(2) Statement of crisis; **and**

(3) Method of verification.

If you use the applicant's statement, document what he says and the date. When you use other evidence, show the type of document used and the date. When using collaterals, show the collateral's name, date, and statement.

If the DSS-8178 does not allow space for proper documentation, attach additional sheets as needed.

B. Time Frames For Authorizing Assistance

1. Time Frame For Authorizing Assistance When Crisis Is Not Life-Threatening

If a household is experiencing a crisis which is not life-threatening, authorize benefits within 48 hours (2 days). This does not mean issuance of benefits, but you must authorize eligibility to alleviate the crisis. These deadlines apply even if another agency is taking the application.

2. Time Frame For Authorizing Assistance When Crisis Is Life-Threatening

Since the household is experiencing a life-threatening situation, authorize benefits within 18 hours. This does not mean issuance of benefits, but you must authorize eligibility to alleviate the crisis. These deadlines apply even if another agency is taking the application.

3. Time Frame For Denying Assistance

Applications must be denied within 48 hours if the household is determined ineligible.

C. Notification of Eligibility

1. If assistance is **approved**, complete a DSS-8107.

2. If assistance is **withdrawn or denied,** complete a DSS-8107.

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921.06 BENEFIT LEVELS AND LIMITATIONS

A. A household may receive benefits more than one time during a calendar year.

B. The maximum benefit that can be paid to a household during a calendar year is $200. There is no requirement that a household must receive $200 in a calendar year.

C. Benefits may vary based upon the severity of the crisis and the services needed; however, benefits cannot exceed $100 per application.

NOTE: If more than $100 is needed to alleviate the crisis, you may not take another Share the Warmth application to make up the difference.

D. **If more than $100 is needed to alleviate the crisis, you must:**

1. Determine if there are other community resources that can be used in conjunction with the $100 or including CIP funds.

2. Negotiate with the vendor to alleviate the crisis for $100; or

3. Counsel the applicant on any available options which can be used. However, apply this option only if you are unable to alleviate the crisis using 1. or 2. above.

If you are unable to alleviate the crisis by one of the means listed above, **deny the application**.

E. **Heating Assistance**

1. Assistance may be provided for eligible households with any bill for usage incurred during the heating season. Use of Share the Warmth funds to pay an old bill from the prior heating year is **not** allowed under this program.

2. At the time of application, a household may be assisted with more than one type of fuel bill as long as the payment does not exceed the maximum benefit allowed per application.

3. Maximum assistance per application is $100, not to exceed a maximum benefit of $200 per household during the calendar year.

4. Funds can be used to assist households with reconnection charges.

5. Funds cannot be used to prevent a crisis.

6. Funds are not to be used for:

   a. Paying deposits;
   b. Paying bills from current or prior residence that are older than 12 months;
   c. Paying for repairs;
   d. Purchase of space heaters, etc.; **or**
   e. Assistance to households whose only crisis is lack of refrigeration.

7. Funds can be used for paying electric or other utility bills.

921.07 METHOD OF PAYMENT

Heating Assistance

Payment must be made in **one** of the ways listed below. **No** other payment method is acceptable.

1. County-issued check to the fuel provider; **or**

2. A two-party check written to both the applicant and fuel provider. It must be clear that the check **cannot** be cashed without the authorized signature of both parties.

3. A voucher/vendor payment.

A household may **never** receive cash assistance to purchase items.

921.08 OTHER SERVICES

See Energy Manual Section EP-200, Outreach and Application Plan, for Linkup and LifeLine Services.