

NEWS RELEASE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

Dept. of Public Welfare

Pennsylvania Gov. Ridge Says Heat-Relief Funding for Families Is on the Way; PA to Accept Applications for Emergency Cooling Funds

**Gov. Ridge Secured \$12.9 Million in Federal Funds for Households Trying to Recover from Extreme Heat;
Between 53,000 and 55,000 Families Statewide Expected to Benefit**

HARRISBURG, Pa., July 28 -- Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Ridge today announced that families in need of assistance to subsidize their cooling needs can apply for money through the Pennsylvania Emergency Cooling Program (ECP) beginning Aug. 2. The program is expected to serve between 53,000 and 55,000 families statewide.

At the request of Gov. Ridge, the federal government recently released \$12.9 million from the federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) to help Pennsylvanians recover from the heat wave.

"I continue to be concerned for the families who are trying to recover from this heat," wrote Gov. Ridge in his recent letter to the President.

"Your authorization to release immediately the LIHEAP contingency funds could provide increased energy benefits to Pennsylvania residents at a great time of need."

The ECP, developed by DPW and the departments of Aging and Community and Economic Development, helps eligible households pay for electric bills and can provide fans and air conditioners to those in need.

"The recent heat wave caused more than 25 deaths in Pennsylvania," Houstoun said. "We want to make sure that no one dies because they don't have a fan or air conditioner, or can't afford cooling bills. Families don't have to be on public assistance or own their own home to qualify."

The program will run through Sept. 30. Money is available on a first-come, first-serve basis until all funds are exhausted.

Eligibility for the program is based upon age, household income, family size and medical necessity. Individuals 65 and older, as well as individuals with physical or mental impairments, or a medical or physical condition are eligible.

The income limit for a single person is \$10,868 and \$14,648 annually for a family of two, the equivalent of 135 percent of poverty based on 1998 federal guidelines.

One-time emergency cooling grants of up to \$100 will be paid directly to the electric company for households that meet the age and financial criteria. These families also can qualify for fans supplied through the program.

For individuals with a verified medical condition for which a physician has prescribed the need for air conditioning, air-conditioning units will be supplied and installed by the program.

Applications will be available at all Area Agencies on Aging and County Assistance Offices. A limited number also will be available through community service agencies.

For more information about Pennsylvania's ECP, individuals can call DPW's free information line at 800-692-7462, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:45 p.m., Monday through Friday.

On July 20, Gov. Ridge declared a drought emergency in 55 counties across Pennsylvania and imposed mandatory restrictions to help Pennsylvanians conserve water as drought conditions continue to deteriorate during the ongoing heat wave.

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SOURCE Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare

Web Site: <http://www.state.pa.us>

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