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News

Letter From the Chair

By Pamela Carter, LIFE Chair

Like many of you, the LIFE Steering Committee has been very busy over the last few months. Hopefully many of you were able to participate in one of our Regional Meetings and benefited from the many months of work that went into organizing the Meetings.

To briefly recap the Regional Meetings, we traveled over 1,700 miles and held seven (7) Meetings across the State starting in Brooklyn on April 30th, Ellicottville on May 5th, Syracuse on May 6th, Binghamton on May 7th, Newburgh on May 12th, Schenectady on May 13th, and ending with Tupper Lake on May 14th. We are pleased to report that nearly 500 consumer leaders and service providers from across the State joined us at these Meetings. The sessions on Consumer Protections, Initiative Client Energy Actions, Weatherization Update, Case Studies on Best Practices, Non – Traditional Resources, and the Hypothetical Family Exercise were very well received.

If you were able to join us at one of the Regional Meetings, thank you for taking time from your busy schedule. We hope you received new information and resources that will assist you in better serving your clients.

While the 2009 Regional Meetings are over, plans for our Statewide Conference on May 18-19, 2010 are under way. Please mark your calendar and plan to join us next year in Albany.

Announcing the 2010 LIFE Statewide Conference

The 2010 LIFE Statewide Conference will be held on May 18-19, 2010 at the Albany Marriott, in Albany. For more information on the conference, please visit www.lifenynews.org.

New Energy Efficiency Web site Launched —

On June 3, 2009, the Public Service Commission launched a new, comprehensive Web site dedicated to increasing consumer awareness and understanding of energy efficiency, including information on reducing energy use, saving money and helping New York meet its energy goals. The site provides "one-stop shopping" for consumers interested in information on energy efficiency programs and services, how to get the most out of their energy dollar, energy-related tax credits, and low-income energy efficiency, and financial assistance programs. The energy efficiency site is accessible through a link on the www.AskPSC.com homepage.

LIFE Sponsors the 3rd Annual Symposium on Poverty and Economic Security

On February 23-24, 2009, the Low-Income Forum on Energy sponsored the New York State Community Action Association's Third Annual Symposium on Poverty and Economic Security.

More than 250 representatives from Community Action, state government, service providers, and advocate organizations attended the symposium. The two-day event featured presentations and information on issues that impact low and moderate income New Yorkers, and featured a keynote address by Dr. Donna Beagle, author of *See Poverty, Be the Difference*.

The Fourth Annual Symposium on Poverty and Economic Security will be held in February 2010, in Albany. For more information on the Symposium or the New York State Community Action Association, please visit www.nyscaaonline.org.



3rd Annual Symposium

ON POVERTY AND ECONOMIC SECURITY

February 23-24, 2009





-Income Forum on Energy



Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Albany



New York State Weatherization Directors' Association



Family Development Association of New York State



New York State Head Start Association

Consumer Tips: Door-to-Door Marketing of Energy Services

If you are considering obtaining electricity and/or natural gas from a supplier other than your utility, please keep the following in mind:

- Utilities do not conduct door-to-door marketing. This marketing technique is conducted only by independent, unregulated companies.
- You can choose to receive or reject marketing and sales information.
- Before inviting a door-to-door marketing representative into your home, or engaging in contract discussions, you should request identification that includes:
 - The full name of the representative
 - A photograph of the representative
 - The full name, business address and telephone number of the company represented

- It is unnecessary to provide the sales representative a copy of your utility bill or the account number unless you are interested in receiving an offer.
- Ask questions. Request a written comparison of the price offered by the supplier and the utility.
- You should carefully review all contract terms before signing, including the fine print and fees for early termination. Read the fine print.
- After signing a contract with an energy supplier, you have three business days to opt out of that contract.

For more information from the NYS Consumer Protection Board, visit <http://www.consumer.state.ny.us>.

Energy Saving Tips: Room Air Conditioners

Here are a few simple energy tips that can help save your energy and money during the summer months:

- Look for the ENERGY STAR® label. ENERGY STAR qualified room air conditioners use at least 10% less energy than conventional models and will save \$100 on your energy bill over their lifetime. They often include timers for better temperature control allowing you to use the minimum amount of energy you need to cool your room.
- Select the unit with the highest Energy Efficiency Ratio (EER) to maximize energy savings.
- Set your air-conditioning thermostat at 78°F or higher during the summer season. Each degree above 75° saves you 3% of the energy used to cool your home.
- Save money and increase your comfort by using a timer or programmable thermostat on your air conditioner.
- Clean the cooling and condenser fans plus the coils to keep your air conditioner operating efficiently and check the filter every month and replace as needed.
- Place your air conditioner in a central window, rather than a corner window, to allow for better air movement.
- Seal spaces around the air conditioner with caulking to prevent cool air from escaping.

Consider This

Cooling needs during the summer months can result in high electric bills. Use the energy saving tips above to reduce your energy use and stay cool during the summer! Consider asking your community groups to publish this information in their weekly bulletins.

Home Energy Audits: Pinch a Watt, Stretch a Therm, Save a Gallon!

When it comes to energy bills, New Yorkers can do more than just pinch pennies. Obtaining a good home energy audit puts the customers in charge of their own energy consumption by empowering them to think about energy in a different way. By shifting the frame of reference from dollars to kilowatts of electricity, or from gallons to therms of oil or gas, etc., the information gained from a home energy audit empowers consumers to make practical choices. Did you realize that every time you flip a switch, touch a thermostat, or plug in a charger, you make a *consumer choice*?

Home energy auditors say, "It's not about deprivation; it's about meeting the consumer's goals in the smartest possible way. They can then decide what comforts they want and how much energy they need to accomplish those goals, or are there more efficient means to get there? An audit puts the consumer back in the driver's seat with the information needed to make the best decisions."

For example, many people prefer to use 60 watt incandescent bulbs for room lighting. A home energy audit will ask: is there a more efficient way to get the same amount of light? We can pinch pennies by turning off the light, or we can pinch kilowatts by making them work more efficiently in a compact fluorescent light bulb (CFL). A 15 watt CFL will provide the same amount of light as a 60 watt incandescent bulb, but at a fraction of the cost in kilowatts and dollars.

During a home energy audit, a trained technician walks through the home, examining current energy use and brainstorming more efficient options with the consumer. For example, the technician will measure how much power the refrigerator is using in order to determine whether or not it would be cost-effective to replace the refrigerator. Consumers with an extra freezer or refrigerator can use this information to decide whether the savings in food or transportation costs are worth the kilowatts to run the extra appliance. The "heavy hitters" of home energy consumption are usually heating and cooling systems, so many home energy audit programs go beyond electricity to also consider gas, oil, and other energy sources. The technician may examine heating and cooling equipment, check ductwork, run a "blower door test" to measure air leakage, and/or evaluate insulation.

Every household is unique, so the audit is a partnership between technician and consumer to develop a personalized plan that works for this particular home.

Here are some results from home energy audits: A Herkimer resident considers the purchase of new insulated windows in order to save oil heating dollars. During a Home Performance with ENERGY STAR audit, the technician discovers that the oil burner is extremely inefficient. The consumer decides to use a low-interest loan through ENERGY STAR Financing to invest in an efficient burner instead of new windows. The home is more comfortable, and the heating oil is "stretched".

Another result: A Long Island family participates in a home energy audit through LIPA REAP. The REAP technician discovers that over two dozen high-wattage light bulbs burn continually in order to accommodate a family member who is slowly losing her sight. The family is unwilling to turn off the lights. So, wherever it is cost-effective, the REAP technician replaces the incandescent bulbs with CFLs, at no charge to the customer. The electricity coming into the home is now working harder, producing more light with less energy, and the drop in usage is reflected in the LIPA bill.

Depending on household size, income and location, New Yorkers may be eligible for subsidized or even free home energy audits. How can they find the program that's right for them? Local electric and gas companies can explain about the home energy audits are available in each community.

Share This Information

Explain to your consumers, family members and friends: Don't just pinch pennies - pinch kilowatts and therms! Make your energy work hard to keep your home as comfortable, safe, and affordable as possible. Consider a home energy audit.

High School Students Team Up with Office For the Aging to Help the Elderly

A very clever teacher and some enlightened students created a project to help the elderly in their area save money, but several other benefits surfaced. The project's goal was to teach students how to make responsible choices in energy use by conservation techniques and to have students reach out to the elderly in the community and use their newfound knowledge to conduct energy audits and make changes for the elderly so that their energy usage is reduced. They targeted the elderly who might have more physical and financial challenges to make the necessary changes.

Through a \$500 grant from NYSERDA's Energy Smart Students program, the Energy/Power class at the Watkins Glen High School purchased audit equipment, such as watt meters, and conservation supplies, such as weather stripping, insulation and water flow devices for the elderly in the community. Students worked with the English department to develop standard operating procedures for making the energy audit outlines. The Office for the Aging compiled the list of recipients according to the highest need and asked the recipients' permission for students to do the activity in their home. The school agreed to provide insurance coverage.

The students conducted energy audits, made recommendations, purchased supplies (teachers would actually do this part) and then returned to the homes to make the appropriate changes. This allowed students to research what is necessary for conducting home energy audits, learn to categorize, and make priority lists. About 150 people were served by this project. Other students wanted to join the Energy/Power class when they saw how proactive the class curriculum was. The school has received a second grant this year to continue this work.

Consider this Action!

In addition to teaching the young and old about energy efficiency, this project fostered community development by connecting teens to their elderly neighbors. This project can be duplicated in any community and provides a great opportunity to combine community service for those most in need with an educational experience.

LIFE Steering Committee

- New York State Department of Public Service
- Association for Energy Affordability
- Cattaraugus Community Action
- Central Hudson Gas & Electric Corporation
- Community Energy Services, Inc.
- Community Power Network of New York State
- Consolidated Edison Company of New York
- Dutchess County Community Action Agency, Inc.
- LIPA/REAP
- National Fuel Gas Distribution Company
- National Grid
- New York State Consumer Protection Board
- New York State Department of State Division of Community Services
- New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal
- New York State Electric & Gas Corporation
- New York State Energy Research and Development Authority
- New York State Office for the Aging
- New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance
- New York State Weatherization Directors' Association
- Public Utility Law Project
- Orange and Rockland Utilities, Inc.
- Rochester Gas and Electric Corporation

Please share and forward this newsletter to colleagues.

If you know someone you would like to add to the LIFE News mailing list, or if you would like to be removed from our mailing list, please send an e-mail to Chris Coll at czc@nysesda.org.

To submit an article to be considered for inclusion in a future issue of LIFE News, please contact LIFE Steering Committee Member, Chris Coll, at 518-862-1090 x 3425 or by e-mail at czc@nysesda.org.

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