



Vermont
Housing &
Conservation
Board

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MEMORANDUM

To: Manager and owners of affordable rental housing
From: Rick DeAngelis, VHCB and Sam Falzone, VHFA
Date: September 9, 2008
Re: Helping Residents Obtain Fuel Assistance

In June, representatives of affordable housing, energy efficiency programs, and government met to discuss both short-term and long-term strategies to address the impact of higher fuel costs on Vermont's affordable housing.

We are contacting you now about an important strategy that was identified in June to help maintain the affordability of the housing you own and manage. The strategy is to take steps to encourage your very low-income residents to apply for assistance from Vermont's Fuel Assistance Program. Over the summer, we have worked with the Fuel Assistance Program to clarify some issues with its use in affordable housing.

We recommend several steps that you might take to help your very-low income residents apply for and maximize benefits:

1. Become familiar with the basics of the Fuel Assistance Program to facilitate your resident's use of it. To help we have organized a training on October 1 (see below). There are several features of the application and benefit distribution process that may be confusing for residents and managers of affordable housing and we strongly recommend your attendance at the workshop to help your residents use it effectively;
2. In cases in which heat is included in the rent, you may want to consider identifying the portion of the rent associated with fuel costs as a "fuel surcharge". This designation will help those residents who are eligible for Fuel Assistance to obtain significantly higher levels of assistance than without it. If this is a tax credit property where your rents are at or near the Maximum Rents allowable, please be aware that any shift in utility expense to the resident will need to be added to the tax credit rent maximum calculation and may require a downward adjustment to the rent portion you can collect from the resident;

3. Please note that residents who receive some form of rental assistance are only eligible for reduced Fuel Assistance benefits. In order to be eligible for the full benefit, it is important that **those who do not receive either project-based or individual rental assistance complete the Fuel Assistance form by replying no to Question #10: "Do you get help with housing costs from a public, subsidized, or section 8 Program?"**
4. Develop an outreach effort to encourage residents to apply for Fuel Assistance. Your outreach might include distributing applications and helping residents complete them. There is still time to organize an outreach effort and help residents apply for full benefits this year.

The training will be offered in cooperation with the Department of Families and Children which administers the Fuel Assistance Program. It will be held at "the Boardroom" on the 4th floor at 133 State Street in Montpelier and begin at 9:30 am and end by noon. Please contact Rick DeAngelis (tel 828-3526 or email rick@vhcb.org) to let us know if you will be attending.

In addition to a review of the Fuel Assistance and how to utilize it in affordable housing, a portion of the agenda will be devoted to a discussion of strategies for promoting resident participation in energy conservation.

We're looking forward to seeing you on the 1st. If you have any questions in the interim or you are unable to attend please call Rick DeAngelis.