

NEWS ON TAP

The NEWS ON TAP Newsletter is part of OHCD's Housing and Disability Technical Assistance Program (TAP) concerning issues related to housing for persons with disabilities in the City of Philadelphia.

August 2010

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Going Green

By Leigh Howard

There is a relationship between disability status and poverty status. In the United States, 25% of the persons with disabilities aged 21 to 64 live below the poverty line, compared to 9% of those without a disability. Pennsylvania's rates are very similar to the national rates. Of the approximately 900,000 Pennsylvania residents aged 21 to 64 with a disability, 25.7 % were below the poverty line in 2005; far exceeding the rate of 7.9% for those aged 21 to 64 without a disability who live below the poverty line.



Households with low-incomes spend a higher percentage of their income on utilities than the U.S. median. The HUD website reports that families at the median income level spend four percent of their income on utilities, while those on SSI spend 19 percent of their income on utilities.

One of the easiest ways to reduce your monthly utility costs is by "greening" your home and reducing your energy consumption. This newsletter article will provide you with simple solutions and low cost ideas for reducing your energy related expenses while increasing the energy efficiency of your home.

Data Sources:

- http://www.phfa.org/forms/housing_study/Hsg_Persons_Disabilities.pdf
- <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/library/energy/homelessness.cfm>

One of the first steps you can take is to determine how much energy you are actually using. From the advanced to the basic, there are many new tools to assist you in this process. Examples include:

- A home power monitor can be installed in your home for about two hundred dollars. The monitor will collect specific data about your energy use, and provide you with up-to-date information about your current energy use or trends over time.
- Another option is to use a kilowatt meter to measure the energy consumption of a specific device. Simply plug the meter into the wall, and then plug the electronic device into the meter. This will allow you to measure how much energy you are using while an item is in use and at rest.
- A third option is to complete an online e-audit of your home's energy use. PECO customers can also take advantage of an online tool that uses the actual energy consumption at your home in order to complete a Smart Home e-Audit. This service can be accessed at <http://www.pecosmartideas.com/energyanalyzer/index.html>. A number of other websites can provide you with tips for reducing energy use based on the characteristics of your home (e.g. age, size, type).

You may be surprised to learn that small appliances and electronics, such as your coffee maker or cable box, consume energy even when they are not in use. One possible solution is to use a smart strip for these types of items, which can be purchased for around \$30. The smart strip cuts the power to a device once it is turned off, which prevents it from continuing to pull down energy. Additionally, the smart strip serves as a surge protector. For a no-cost solution, the same benefits can be accomplished by simply unplugging devices when they are not in use.

Once you know which electrical items are unnecessarily using energy and increasing your bills, there are a number of minor, low-cost modifications you can make that will make a major impact. These include:

- Caulk around the frames of windows and doors in order to prevent airflow.
- Install weather stripping around exterior doors and garage doors.
- Install a programmable thermostat that will automatically raise and lower your heat based on when you will be home.
- Replace the filters in your air conditioner and furnace. Replacing them at the recommended times will ensure optimal efficiency.
- Replace incandescent lightbulbs with energy efficient bulbs.
- Install water savers or low-flow faucets in sinks and showers to reduce their flow.
- Wrap pipes and water heaters with a thermal barrier. This helps the water heater to run more efficiently by maintaining its heat.
- During the winter, cover windows with plastic wrap to prevent the loss of heat and offset the impact of cold wind.
- If you are a homeowner, replace appliances with energy efficient appliances when they need to be replaced.

Whether you are a home owner or renter, there are no cost ways to reduce your energy consumption by changing the way you do things around the house:

- Use your microwave or outdoor grill when your stove and oven are not required. This will help to keep your kitchen and the entire house cooler.
- Only run the dishwasher when it is full, and let your dishes air-dry instead of steam dry.
- Since up to 90% of the cost of using your washing machine is associated with heating the water for warm and hot loads, wash your laundry in cold water to save a great deal of energy. Additionally, air drying your clothes on a line outside, or even in your basement, will prevent you from running your dryer longer than necessary.
- A full refrigerator not only provides you with lots of yummy options to eat, but also helps to regulate the temperature inside the box.
- Open and close curtains based on the outside temperature and the location of the sun. This will help to naturally regulate the temperature of your home. In the summer, curtains can be used to block the heat of the sun. In winter, open the curtains to let the warmth of the sun inside. Thick curtains can also be used in winter to help block cold winds and drafts.
- And finally, one of the largest impacts on your energy consumption can be realized by simply adjusting your thermostat when you are sleeping and/or away from home.

There are many resources available to provide home energy assessments and weatherization. The Energy Coordinating Agency (ECA) provides free energy education workshops, as well as free weatherization services to individuals with low incomes. To learn more about the ECA's programs, visit <http://www.ecasavesenergy.org/services/low-income-programs>, or visit one of their ECA's Neighborhood Energy Centers. To find the Neighborhood Energy Center in your community, visit <http://www.ecasavesenergy.org/services/neighborhood-energy-centers>.

In addition to the local resources provided by the Energy Coordinating Agency, PECO offers home assessments and rebate programs. There are also rebate and tax credit programs available through the state and federal government. Although Dorothy followed the yellow brick road, now is the perfect time to begin your journey down the green path. The following websites will direct you to additional information and resources.

Resources:

- <http://www.ecasavesenergy.org/services/low-income-programs>
- http://www.peco.com/pecores/assistance_prgs/liurp.htm
- http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=tax_credits.tx_index
- <http://paheatingrebates.com/>
- <http://www.keystonehelp.com/index.php>



Attention!

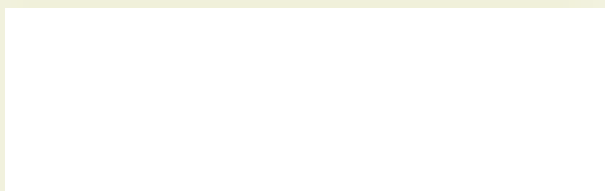
Homefinder Wanted!!!

Have you or someone you know found housing through the Philly Homefinder? If so, we would like to feature someone who has located housing through this website in a newsletter article.

Please contact Leigh Howard
for more information at leigh@dma-housing.com.

NEWS ON TAP is published by Diana T. Myers and Associates, Inc.
and is funded by the Philadelphia Office of Housing and Community Development
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