

PLATTSBURGH-This winter's heat relief program, heat and energy assistance program, becomes available for area residents, beginning November 3.

JCEO assists with an early access program to HEAP, which began mailing out 2008 HEAP applications in early August for low-income residents.

"Apply in person, and apply early this year," said Judy Carpenter, HEAP caseworker. "HEAP has been in business for 33 yrs. But this year 2008, I think will be the biggest need for heating funding due to the much higher price of fuel."

Eligibility is met by one of the following criteria: receiving food stamps, temporary assistance cash, disabled, senior citizen, or have at least one child under 6 years.

In circumstances where the criterion above is not met, low-income individuals or families may still be eligible for HEAP, depending on household energy burden ratio.

"Participants are encouraged to enroll in the auto-pay option for their HEAP benefits," she said.

According to Carpenter, the auto-pay saves paper and in some instances actually speeds the process of receiving the HEAP benefits to both the individual and family and to the heat supplier.

Fuel assistance varies as does the fuels used: oil, kerosene, propane, or electricity. Electricity help and shut offs are also considered for HEAP benefits.

Minimum awarded benefits starts at \$130 and may reach up to \$580 on an initial awarded benefit. However, eligible participants can also be awarded an emergency second HEAP benefit grant of \$800, depending on availability of funding sources this year.

This year, HEAP is starting something new. People can go online to access their benefits and keep up to date. For more information about your HEAP, visit

www.mybenefitsny.gov

In previous years HEAP benefit amounts have been less, and the paperwork was more complex, however with new technology, customers can be more informed with less paperwork, seeing heating benefits earlier than ever before in the 33 year history of HEAP.

Persons applying need not live in only Plattsburgh. Other nearby communities also can apply for HEAP.

HARD NEWS