

Area Agency on Aging *Connections*

Prepare your home now for colder weather months ahead

By Daniel Casciato
For Pittsburgh Senior News

As cooler months approach, staying warm and safe can become a challenge for many seniors. Although staying indoors as much as possible can help reduce your risk of having an automobile accident or falling on the ice, there are other problems you may face in your home when the weather gets cold; for example, your home may not be properly equipped to keep you warm.

Exposure to cold temperatures, whether indoors or outside, can cause other health concerns as well, some of which can be serious or life-threatening. To keep safe, be prepared for winter weather, know how to prevent cold-related health problems, and also know what to do if a cold-weather emergency does arise.

Now is the time to get your home ready for the winter. Begin your preparations early in the season so that you're ready to react quickly when a winter storm is forecast. Here are some home weatherization tips to follow:

- Assemble and check your existing emergency kits. Get in the habit of factoring the weather into your daily plans and be ready to cancel or reschedule plans.
- Have your furnace inspected and replace your furnace filter. In fact, have your furnace checked and serviced annually.
- Insulate your water heater.
- Close heater vents and doors to unused rooms.

- Do not use propane stoves and barbecues indoors and avoid using candles if at all possible as they can be extremely dangerous, particularly if you have grandchildren or pets around.

- Improving your home's insulation is one of the most cost-efficient ways to reduce energy waste. If your floors, ceilings and walls feel much colder or hotter than room temperature, they may need more insulation. Insulate walls, ceilings and even your attic completely.

- Apply caulk and weather-stripping around doors and windows that leak air.



- Be sure to seal air leaks where plumbing, ducts and electrical wiring enter your home.

- Wood-burning fireplaces should have tightly fitting dampers that are closed when the fireplace is not in use.

- Make sure that all of your heating ducts and registers are working properly.

For assistance with any home weatherization needs, the Pennsylvania Weatherization Assistance Program is administered through the Pennsylvania Department of Community and



Economic Development. The program's goal is to increase the energy efficiency of dwellings occupied by low-income residents, helping to reduce their energy costs while safeguarding their health and safety. The program prioritizes low-income residents at higher risk including seniors, individuals with disabilities, and families with children. For more information, call (866) 550-4355. Protecting your home against extreme weather can lower your energy use up to 50 percent, which means big savings on your next heating bill.

For those who may have problems paying their utility bills, the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) provides cash and crisis assistance with residential heating bills. If you have fallen behind on utility payments, call your utility companies to arrange a payment plan. Most utilities have Energy Assistance Programs (EAPs) that low-income individuals may be able to access if they have had a temporary financial crisis.

LIHEAP, a federally funded program, helps low-income seniors pay their heating bills through energy assistance grants. Seniors do not have to have an unpaid bill to receive energy assistance; they can receive this money without being on welfare. No lien is placed on your property if you receive this help.

Additional money is available to seniors in emergency situations and in jeopardy of losing their heat. Emergency situations include:



- Broken heating equipment or leaking lines that must be fixed or replaced;

- Lack of fuel;

- Termination of utility service; and

- Danger of being without fuel or of having utility service terminated.

LIHEAP operates during the heating season starting in October and typically ending in March. For more information, call (412) 562-0330. *PSN*