



The bi-monthly bulletin of the Low-Income Energy Network (LIEN)

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- **Raise awareness about energy poverty during the provincial election - LIEN's Lobby Kit now available on-line**

LIEN has been working hard to ensure that low-income people have affordable energy bills and access to conservation programs to reduce their energy use and help combat climate change. We have designed a Lobby Kit which offers an introduction to the problem of energy poverty and how it can be best addressed. The kit includes some simple templates which you can use locally in your advocacy work with politicians and your community. Pay special attention to page 19 which outlines how you can help advocate in the provincial election for commitments from the political parties to address energy poverty, particularly for energy conservation and rate assistance programs for low-income households.

- **LIEN urges Premier McGuinty to put affordable energy rate program in place for low-income consumers**

On August 31st, LIEN wrote a letter to Premier Dalton McGuinty and the Ministers for Energy, Environment, Housing, and Community & Social Services, calling on the government to act on implementing a permanent energy rate affordability program – a key component in the comprehensive strategy that LIEN has been recommending to address energy poverty in Ontario. LIEN stressed in the correspondence that, as Ontarians go to the polls on October 10th, the issues of energy, poverty and health will be of critical importance.

LIEN has not received a reply from the Energy Minister to our May 9th written request that he issue a Ministerial Directive to the Ontario Energy Board to hold a generic hearing on the impact of energy prices on low-income consumers. At such a generic hearing, LIEN wants the OEB to consider and implement solutions that would include a low-income energy rate assistance program.

- **Union Gas offers no-cost Energy Savings Kit to low-income customers**

Union Gas has developed a free energy efficiency and conservation program, "Helping Homes Conserve", targeted at low-income homeowners and low-income tenants who pay for their energy bills directly and are Union Gas customers. Low-income participants will benefit from the free installation of an Energy Saving Kits (which contain up to 2 low-flow showerheads, two faucet aerators, and pipe insulation) and the free installation of a programmable thermostat. Customers must have a natural gas water heater to qualify for the ESK installation, and a natural gas furnace to qualify for the programmable thermostat installation. The program was launched in Hamilton on August 17th and will be expanded this fall to include other cities in Union Gas territory. For more information, eligibility criteria and to obtain an application form, visit www.helpinghomes.ca OR call 1-866-354-5098.

Union Gas has indicated to LIEN that it expects to launch in 2008 a low-income demand-side management program that may include more extensive measures to address energy inefficient appliances, the building envelope and heating systems.

- **No financial penalties for OW/ODSP recipients participating in energy conservation programs**

LIEN has been actively working with the Ministry of Community and Social Services to remove any barriers and/or disincentives to social assistance recipients' participation in low-income energy conservation & demand management/demand side management (CDM/DSM) programs – and we have notified the Ministry as these programs were launched in Ontario. As a result, directives and bulletins have been issued by the Ministry, confirming that financial grants, items or services provided through electricity distributors' CDM programs and natural gas distributors' DSM programs are not considered income or assets for the purposes of social assistance. Items and services provided under the OPA's low-income Energy Efficiency Assistance Program for Houses Pilot Program have also been exempted from the income and asset rules.

- **Extra charges for air-conditioning may be illegal - check your lease agreement**

As summer approached, hundreds of tenants across Ontario were receiving notices from their landlords requesting the payment of an extra charge (for example, \$30 or \$50 monthly), in addition to their rent, for the electricity used to run an air conditioner in their rental unit. Unless there is a provision in a tenant's lease agreement which allows for extra charges to operate an air-conditioner, a landlord cannot unilaterally charge for extra utility costs. It is an offence under the *Residential Tenancies Act* (RTA) for a landlord to ask for a new charge for electricity for air-conditioning when this utility is included in the monthly rent.

- **What you need to know about energy retail contracts - OEB launches consumer awareness campaign**

There has been an increase in residential energy retailing activity across the province, with door-to-door salespeople offering consumers the option to purchase energy itself (electricity or gas) at a contracted price. It is especially important that low-income consumers understand the financial implications of signing such energy retail contracts, as they may end up paying more for the commodity on their utility bills.

The Ontario Energy Board (OEB) is offering an information session that can help consumers when they are deciding how to buy their electricity or natural gas. This is so as to provide consumers with comprehensive information regarding energy contracts and help them become more aware of their rights, options and responsibilities. Earlier in the summer, the OEB launched a consumer awareness campaign entitled "The Energy Choice is Yours" to address this matter: <http://www.oeb.gov.on.ca/energychoiceisyours/en/index.htm>

The OEB wants to continue to reach consumers with the campaign and has contacted LIEN, along with other targeted organizations, for assistance in identifying groups across Ontario that may benefit from the information sessions.

LIEN Currents is issued bi-monthly by the Low-Income Energy Network for members and others interested in solutions to energy poverty in Ontario. For more information, contact Zee Bhanji at bhanjiz@lao.on.ca or 416-597-5855 ext. 5167. You can also visit our website at www.lowincomeenergy.ca

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