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Crisis Fuel Assistance

3100 **Crisis Fuel Assistance** (06/22/2024, 23-20)

- a. The Fuel Assistance Program is authorized and funded by the federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) block grant ([42 U.S.C. §§ 8621–8630](#)), and through the State of Vermont Home Heating Fuel Assistance Program ([33 V.S.A. §§ 2601–2609](#)).
- b. It is the purpose of the Fuel Assistance Program to secure the safety and health of low-income Vermont households by providing essential home heating assistance.
- c. The Fuel Assistance Program offers both seasonal fuel assistance, rules 2900–2927, and crisis fuel assistance, rules 3100–3113.
 1. The Seasonal Fuel Assistance Rules are incorporated by reference herein to the extent they do not conflict with these Crisis Fuel Assistance Rules.
- d. Crisis fuel assistance may be granted to alleviate an emergency for households at risk of being without heat.
- e. The Department may contract with community or other organizations for crisis fuel eligibility determination and benefit issuance.
 1. If the Department contracts with another entity, these Crisis Fuel Assistance Rules apply.
- f. Each year the Department shall allocate an appropriate amount of funds to the crisis fuel assistance program.
- g. These rules are adopted pursuant to [33 V.S.A. § 2602\(b\)](#) and [§ 2609\(a\)](#).

Definitions

5. “Living Unit” means a structure that meets all the following criteria:
 - i. Is occupied by one or more members of the household;
 - ii. Is used as the household’s primary domicile;
 - iii. Is one or more of the following:
 - A. Affixed to the ground on a permanent foundation;
 - B. A manufactured home as defined by [9A V.S.A. § 9-102\(a\)\(53\)](#); or
 - C. Permanently immobile and not accessing water or electricity from another living unit or building;
 - iv. Contains one or more rooms;
 - v. Contains bathroom facilities specific to that unit;
 - vi. Contains kitchen facilities specific to that unit; and
 - vii. Has either:
 - A. A private entrance from the outside; or
 - B. A private entrance from an enclosed hallway leading from the outside that does not pass through or offer open access to any other living unit within the structure.
6. “Primary Heating Fuel” means the energy type listed in the Standard Heating Cost Tables that provides the largest portion of heat in the living unit.
7. “Resident” means a person who has been physically present in the State of Vermont and intends to make Vermont one’s permanent home, regardless of how long the person has lived in the State.
 - i. A person in Vermont involuntarily, or for a temporary purpose, is not a resident.

Crisis Fuel Eligibility

3102 **Crisis Fuel Eligibility** (06/22/2024, 23-20)

- a. These rules are intended to provide a framework for staff to grant assistance to households that are facing a heating crisis.
- b. The crisis fuel assistance program is not an entitlement program, and the Department retains discretion over whether to issue benefits to a household and the amount of any such benefits.
- c. A household may be eligible for crisis fuel assistance if they meet all the following criteria:
 1. All the members of a household must be Vermont residents at the time of application for crisis fuel assistance;
 - i. A person remains a resident until the person moves outside the State of Vermont with the intent to permanently reside elsewhere;
 2. A household member must be a citizen or national of the United States or a qualified immigrant under Seasonal Fuel Assistance Rule 2907;
 3. The total gross income of all fuel household members must not exceed 200% of the federal poverty guidelines based on household size;
 - i. Fuel household membership shall be determined using Seasonal Fuel Assistance Rules 2903–2904;
 - ii. A household’s total gross income shall be calculated using Seasonal Fuel Assistance Rules 2910–2912, except:
 - A. Income must be calculated based only on income actually received by the household in the 30 days before the application is submitted, regardless of the source of income; and
 - B. Income tax forms shall not be used to calculate income; and
 - iii. The allowable income maximum for each household size shall be updated in the Fuel Procedures Manual in accordance with the federal poverty guidelines published by the U.S. Department for Health and Human Services.
 4. The household must:
 - i. Receive seasonal fuel assistance;

Crisis Fuel Eligibility

- ii. Apply for seasonal fuel assistance at the same time as the application for crisis fuel assistance;
 - iii. Submit a seasonal fuel assistance application as soon as possible if extenuating circumstances prevent the simultaneous submission of applications for seasonal fuel assistance and crisis fuel assistance; or
 - iv. Have a gross household income above 185% of the federal poverty guidelines based on household size;
5. The Department or a crisis fuel worker has determined that a household has a home heating emergency need, including:
- i. The household's primary heating fuel tank is at 25% or less of its full capacity;
 - ii. There is one week's supply or less of fuel for households whose primary heating sources include firewood, wood pellets, or coal; or
 - iii. The household has received a disconnect notice from a metered utility, and the utility is responsible for either:
 - A. Providing the household's primary fuel source; or
 - B. Operating a necessary component of the household's primary home heating equipment.
6. The household must demonstrate that unforeseen extenuating circumstances have prevented the household from heating the living unit; and
7. The head of household must spend at least 150 non-consecutive nights in their living unit between November 1 and April 30.
- d. A household that has its primary heating fuel cost included in its rent may be eligible for crisis fuel assistance if the household meets all the eligibility criteria in subsection (c) of this rule and either of the following conditions are met:
- 1. The landlord is not available to authorize continuation of the primary heating fuel; or
 - 2. The health or safety of a household member is threatened and no one in the household caused the home heating emergency need, as determined by the eligibility staff.

Life-Threatening Home Heating Crisis

3103 **Life-Threatening Home Heating Crisis** (06/22/2024, 23-20)

- a. A life-threatening home heating crisis occurs when:
 - 1. A household has an imminent risk of being without heat; and
 - 2. A member of that household is unable to temporarily relocate to a heated space because of a documented medical condition.

- b. If a household has a life-threatening home heating crisis and the household is eligible for crisis fuel assistance under these rules, then the Department or a crisis fuel worker must make reasonable efforts to resolve the home heating crisis within 18 hours after the Department or crisis fuel worker determines the household is eligible for assistance.

- c. A household with a life-threatening home heating crisis that receives crisis fuel assistance must submit documentation in accordance with rule 3107(h).

Crisis Fuel Application

3104 **Crisis Fuel Application** (06/22/2024, 23-20)

- a. A household must file a separate crisis fuel application each time the household requests crisis fuel assistance.
- b. An applicant must apply in person unless any of the following exceptions apply:
 - 1. The applicant's need is particularly urgent;
 - 2. Weather conditions prevent the applicant from applying in person;
 - 3. The applicant is unable meet in person due to illness;
 - 4. The applicant is elderly or disabled; or
 - 5. Other extenuating circumstances prevent an applicant from meeting in person.
- c. Certain designated employees of Area Agencies on Aging may act on behalf of an elderly or disabled applicant if the applicant is unable to apply in person or remotely.
- d. Total household income and household size must be recalculated each time an applicant applies for crisis fuel assistance.
- e. An applicant must provide the Social Security Numbers of all household members in accordance with Seasonal Fuel Assistance Rule 2909.
- f. Applications are not final unless they are completed, signed, and returned to a crisis fuel worker with required verifications.
- g. New applicants must provide documents to the crisis fuel worker to verify their identity and immigration status, pursuant to Seasonal Fuel Assistance Rules 2908.1 and 2908.2, at the time they submit their applications for fuel benefits.
- h. If an applicant does not provide all the necessary documents to process an application, the crisis fuel worker may contact the applicant to request such documents.
- i. Failure to comply with the application requirements under subsections (e) or (f) of this rule may result in:

Crisis Fuel Application

1. Forfeiture of all rights to receive fuel assistance in the future; or
 2. Recovery by the Department of assistance already granted, including recovery from seasonal fuel benefits; or
 3. Both (1) and (2) above.
- j. The crisis fuel worker may deny the application if the crisis fuel worker is unable to verify the identity or immigration status of any applicant.
- k. Crisis fuel workers must accept applications from the last Monday in November to the second Friday in April for all households whose primary heating fuel is oil, kerosene, bulk propane, coal, firewood, or wood pellets.
- l. Crisis fuel workers must accept applications from the last Monday in November to the last business day in April for all households whose primary heating fuel is electricity, natural gas, or metered propane.
- m. Applicants must provide all the following information at the time of application:
1. The name of the household's primary heating fuel supplier and the supplier's contact information;
 2. The account number provided by the primary heating fuel supplier associated with the household's primary residence;
 3. The name of the household's electricity provider and the account number provided by the household's electricity provider associated with the household's primary residence; and
 4. Any other information required by the Department or the crisis fuel worker to facilitate the issuance of benefits to the household.
- n. Notwithstanding subsections (k) and (l) of this rule, the Department may change the dates for accepting applications based on weather conditions or funding.

Crisis Fuel After-Hours Assistance

3105 **Crisis Fuel After-Hours Assistance** (06/22/2024, 23-20)

- a. During the crisis fuel heating season, the Department must provide heating assistance outside of regular business hours in accordance with this rule.
 - 1. The Department may contract with another person to provide assistance under this rule.
- b. The Department may limit after-hours assistance to certain days and times, and the Department may change the days and times it provides after-hours assistance.
- c. The Department may provide after-hours assistance only to households with no heat.
- d. The Department may provide any after-hours assistance necessary to heat the living unit of a qualifying household, including:
 - 1. Providing the household with fuel;
 - 2. Providing a household's fuel supplier with a voucher for the benefit of the household;
 - 3. Repairing or replacing equipment necessary to provide heat to the household;
 - 4. Providing electric heaters or alternative sources of heat; or
 - 5. Supplying any other goods or services necessary to heat the living unit in which the household resides.
- e. Qualifying households are not entitled to any particular form of assistance under this rule.
- f. The Department may impose additional qualifications on households to receive some or all forms of after-hours assistance provided by the Department.
 - 1. For example, the Department may limit the provision of fuel after hours only to households that have a member who is elderly, disabled, or under the age of six.
 - 2. The Department may also impose limits on the number of times a household receives after-hours assistance during the crisis fuel heating season.
- g. Households seeking after-hours heating assistance must be interviewed by a crisis fuel worker by telephone or by another method permitted by the Department.

Crisis Fuel After-Hours Assistance

- h. The crisis fuel worker may deny after-hours assistance if:
 - 1. The household could have reasonably avoided the emergency that resulted in the lack of heat;
 - 2. The household is ineligible for assistance under rule 3102;
 - 3. The household does not meet the qualifications established by the Department under this rule 3105 to receive after-hours assistance; or
 - 4. The household is reasonably able to wait until the following business day to apply for assistance.
- i. A household that receives after-hours assistance must submit a completed written crisis fuel application to a crisis fuel worker, in accordance with rule 3104, as soon as reasonably possible.

Crisis Fuel Heating Season

3106 **Crisis Fuel Heating Season** (06/22/2024, 23-20)

- a. The crisis fuel heating season begins on the last Monday of November each year and ends on April 30 of the following year.

- b. Notwithstanding subsection (a) of this rule, at the sole discretion of the Department's Commissioner, the Department may change the dates of the crisis fuel heating season.

Crisis Fuel Verification

3107 **Crisis Fuel Verification** (06/22/2024, 23-20)

- a. Income of all persons in the fuel household, regardless of the source of income, must be verified unless the Department or the crisis worker has verified the household's income in the past 30 calendar days and the household's eligibility circumstances have not changed.
- b. A person's self-declaration of income, by itself, shall not be an acceptable method of verification, and an applicant must provide any business-related or income-related document requested by the Department or the crisis worker to verify income.
- c. Verification from an eligible applicant's landlord is required when all the following conditions are present:
 1. The applicant is seeking crisis assistance to:
 - i. Avert an imminent disconnection of the applicant's electric service; or
 - ii. Reestablish the applicant's electric service;
 2. The applicant's electric service is required to operate the heating system in a multi-family building; and
 3. The heating system (e.g., furnace) is located outside the applicant's living unit.
- d. All verification must be provided at the time of application or within five calendar days of the application date.
 1. The Department may extend or waive the five-day deadline to provide verification if:
 - i. A natural disaster prevents the household from providing verification;
 - ii. A household member's serious illness prevents the household from providing verification;
 - iii. The employer of a household member has refused, or is unable, to provide income verification;
 - iv. The household's landlord is unavailable to provide the verification required by subsection (c) of this rule; or

Crisis Fuel Verification

- v. Extenuating circumstances, beyond the household's control, prevent the household from providing timely verification.
- e. Except in the case of first-time applicants, the crisis worker may grant assistance prior to receipt of verification when the following conditions exist:
 - 1. The urgency of the situation requires immediate action, which the crisis worker has documented;
 - 2. The applicant agrees to produce verification within five calendar days; and
 - 3. The applicant's statement indicates that the household will be eligible when verification is produced.
- f. A crisis worker may not grant assistance prior to receipt of verification of identity and immigration status from a new applicant, but verification of other eligibility factors may be delayed for the reasons provided in subsection (e) of this rule.
- g. When any eligibility factor is questionable, the applicant may be required to provide additional evidence to verify one or more eligibility factors.
- h. In a life-threatening home heating crisis, the medical condition must be documented by a licensed medical professional within 30 calendar days of the application.

Crisis Fuel Benefits

3108 **Crisis Fuel Benefits** (06/22/2024, 23-20)

- a. Benefits are limited to payment for the following:
1. A minimum delivery of bulk fuels not to exceed:
 - i. 125 gallons for oil, propane, kerosene, and other liquid fuels, or less when the provider allows for a smaller minimum delivery;
 - ii. One ton of coal or pellets; or
 - iii. One cord of wood.
 2. When a disconnection notice has been issued for a metered service, such as natural gas, electricity or propane, the benefit payment will be no more than:
 - i. One half of the most recent metered service bill, when billing is for two months of service;
 - ii. The amount of the prior month's bill; or
 - iii. The minimum amount required by the utility to avert the discontinuation of service.
 - A. A service limiter may be considered equivalent to a shut-off notice.
 3. Heating unit start-up charges, including pressure tests;
 4. Utility service charges required for operation of the heating unit to avert shut off; or
 5. Bulk fuel in a can or cans to temporarily maintain heat.
- b. When an applicant's fuel tank is empty, the crisis fuel worker may authorize payment to a certified fuel supplier for a special trip to deliver fuel to the applicant's tank, if the supplier charges extra for such a delivery and no other options are available to temporarily heat the living unit.
1. If the Department pays special fuel charges or related charges on behalf of a household under this rule, the applicant must sign a notice acknowledging that the Department will not pay for such charges again.

Crisis Fuel Benefits

2. If special fuel charges and/or related charges are paid by the Department under this rule, the Department shall not pay such charges on the household's behalf again, regardless of whether the applicant receives or signs the notice required by this rule.
- c. Qualifying households are not entitled to any particular form of assistance under this rule.
- d. The Department or a crisis fuel worker must make reasonable efforts to resolve the home heating crisis within 48 hours after the Department or crisis fuel worker determines the household is eligible for crisis fuel assistance.
- e. No crisis fuel worker may authorize payment for, and the Department shall not pay, a deposit on a household's behalf.

Crisis Fuel Limits

3109 **Crisis Fuel Limits** (06/22/2024, 23-20)

- a. Regardless of a household’s eligibility, the Department and crisis fuel workers may issue crisis fuel benefits only if there are funds available that have been appropriated for such benefits.
 - 1. If funds become unavailable, the Department and crisis fuel workers must stop issuing crisis fuel benefits, regardless of a household’s eligibility.
 - 2. If funds remain available, the Department and crisis fuel workers must stop issuing crisis fuel benefits at the end of each crisis fuel heating season, regardless of a household’s eligibility.
- b. An eligible household under these rules that is receiving or is eligible for seasonal fuel benefits may receive no more than one crisis fuel benefit during the crisis fuel heating season.
- c. If a household is eligible for benefits under these rules because the household’s income exceeds 185% of the federal poverty guidelines, but does not exceed 200% of the federal poverty guidelines, then the household may receive no more than two crisis fuel benefits during the crisis fuel heating season.

Crisis Fuel Referrals

3110 **Crisis Fuel Referrals** (06/22/2024, 23-20)

- a. The crisis fuel worker must make appropriate referrals to assist applicants in the prevention of future fuel emergencies.
- b. Applicants must follow up on referrals to receive crisis fuel assistance in the future.
- c. Each household that receives crisis fuel assistance must accept services from the home weatherization assistance program.

Crisis Fuel Notice and Appeal Rights

3112 **Crisis Fuel Notice and Appeal Rights** (06/22/2024, 23-20)

- a. When issuing a decision or taking an action affecting an applicant or a household's benefits, the crisis fuel worker must provide written notice to the applicant or household of their right to appeal the decision or action.
 1. The notice shall inform applicants and households of how and when to appeal.
 2. An applicant or household, that is aggrieved by any action or inaction of a crisis fuel worker, is referred to in this rule 3112 as an "Appellant."
- b. An Appellant may request the Director of the Community Action Agency, where the crisis fuel application was submitted, to review the crisis fuel worker's action or inaction.
 1. An Appellant that wants a Director's review must notify the Community Action Agency within two business days of the crisis fuel worker's action or decision.
 2. If the Community Action Agency has not acted on a crisis fuel application within one business day after the application was submitted, the Appellant must request an immediate review within three business days after the application was submitted.
 3. A Director is not required to review a crisis fuel worker's action or inaction if the Appellant does not request a review within the times provided in this subsection (b).
- c. If an Appellant timely requests a Director's review, the review must proceed as follows:
 1. The Community Action Agency's Director may have a designee conduct the review, so long as the designee is not the crisis fuel worker who acted on or failed to act on the application.
 2. A Director's (or designee's) review is intended to be an informal process conducted by the Community Action Agency in any manner that is not inconsistent with the law or these Crisis Fuel Assistance Rules.
 3. An Appellant may have another person assist them during the review.
 4. The Director or designee must listen to the Appellant and examine the Appellant's application and case file.

Crisis Fuel Notice and Appeal Rights

5. In addition to the application and case file, the Director or designee must consider one or more of the following:
 - i. The Appellant's specific emergency;
 - ii. The predictability of the emergency;
 - iii. Appellant's extenuating circumstances;
 - iv. Actions taken by the Appellant to avoid or minimize the emergency;
 - v. Whether crisis fuel benefits will alleviate the Appellant's emergency; or
 - vi. Other solutions that would alleviate the Appellant's emergency.
6. The Director or designee may waive one or more of the Community Action Agency's policies or procedures in extraordinary circumstances in the interest of justice.
 - i. The Director or designee may not waive any Department rule, including these Crisis Fuel Assistance Rules, or any other legal requirement or regulation.
7. The Director or designee must consult with the Department about a review requested by an Appellant under the following circumstances:
 - i. The Director or designee may consult with the Department about any issue raised by an Appellant.
 - ii. If the Director or designee intends to uphold a denial of benefits, the Director or designee must consult with the Department.
 - A. The Director or designee may not deny benefits to an Appellant after a review unless the Department endorses the denial.
 - B. The Community Action Agency must issue crisis fuel benefits to an Appellant after a review if directed to do so by the Department.
8. The review must be completed, and the Director or designee must issue a written decision regarding the Appellant's grievance, within one business day of receiving the request from the Appellant.

Crisis Fuel Notice and Appeal Rights

9. The Director's or designee's written decision must inform the Appellant of:
 - i. The Department's endorsement if the Director or designee upholds the denial of crisis fuel benefits; and
 - ii. The right to appeal a decision to the Human Services Board, including how and when to request a fair hearing with the Board.
10. If the Director does not hold a review or issue a written decision within two business days of an Appellant's request for a Director's review, the Appellant must inform the Department within two business days of an Appellant's request for a Director's review.
- d. If the Appellant does not agree with the Director's or designee's decision, the Appellant must request a hearing with the Human Services Board within 90 calendar days of the Director's or designee's decision.
 1. The Appellant must follow all the requirements of this rule 3112, including all applicable deadlines, before submitting a request for a fair hearing to the Human Services Board.
 2. If an Appellant communicates to the Department or the Community Action Agency that the Appellant wishes to appeal a Director's or designee's decision, the Department or Agency must immediately notify the Human Services Board of the Appellant's request for a fair hearing, regardless of whether the Appellant has followed all requirements stated in these rules.
 - i. The Human Services Board must determine whether the Appellant exhausted administrative remedies before the Appellant requested a fair hearing.

Severability

3113 **Severability** (06/22/2024, 23-20)

- a. The provisions of these rules are severable.

- b. If any provision of these rules is invalid, or if any application thereof to any person or circumstance is invalid, the invalidity shall not affect other provisions or applications of these rules which can be given.