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## Energy Conservation Help for Low-Income Residents

By Cathy Tyson



Rare is the day when residents can get something for nothing, but Contra Costa County has an on-going weatherization program that is the lucky recipient of additional federal stimulus funds that will more than triple its usual \$1.2 million dollar budget to \$4.3 million. The program is designed to reduce household energy use and associated costs in the homes of low-income people by installing energy efficiency improvements like replacing refrigerators that are at least ten years old or installing ceiling fans to cut down on air conditioning, in addition replacing broken window glass, installing weather stripping, replacing furnace filters and more is available. According to Michael Angelo Silva, Chief, Property Conservation with Contra Costa County, "All of that money needs to be spent by September of 2011." He noted that there is no current backlog of requests. For residents who qualify, right now is a good time to start saving on energy bills. To get started, all it takes is a phone call to the

courtesy of [www.fypower.com](http://www.fypower.com)

number listed below.

Eligibility criteria are based on maximum household income, ranging from a gross yearly income of \$29,172 for a single person to \$56,101 for a family of four, adjusting upward for bigger families. Even seniors who now live in a million dollar house, but only receive Social Security as income would qualify as well as a renter in an apartment building. As funding increases, those income limits may be adjusted upward to allow more participants access to the program said Silva.

After filing out a simple application, providing proof of gross income, providing a PG & E bill and documenting citizenship, residents throughout the county can qualify. Emergency items like a water heater or furnace replacement can be completed in approximately 48 hours.

Obviously the County will be hiring more workers to meet increased demand, one of the many goals of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, better known as an economic stimulus package.

The Obama administration recently announced plans to invest \$3.2 billion in energy efficiency and conservation projects as part of the stimulus package. Over half of that amount, \$1.9 billion will go to cities and counties throughout the U.S. according to the California Energy Commission. California has been allocated \$49.6 million.

The goal is to, "Assist cities and counties in implementing projects and programs to reduce total energy use, reduce fossil fuel emissions and improve energy efficiency," according to the California Energy Commission.

There is help available for even non-low-income California residents; the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008 contains various energy tax incentives to encourage conservation. Tax credits of up to \$1,500 for installing energy-efficient windows, including skylights and storm windows, and for replacing older air conditioners, furnaces or water heaters are available.

For more information on the low-income programs call (925) 335-1116 or check out their website [www.co.contra-costa.ca.us/index.asp?nid=282](http://www.co.contra-costa.ca.us/index.asp?nid=282). For more general information on the energy component of the economic stimulus package - go to [www.energy.ca.gov/recovery/](http://www.energy.ca.gov/recovery/) or [www.fypower.org](http://www.fypower.org) for lots of relevant information from Flex Your Power on rebates, services, and energy efficient appliances.

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