

Owner News

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Metropolitan
Boston Housing
Partnership

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Get set with winter fuel savings before the snow flies

Another severe winter is coming; plan ahead to maximize energy savings

The forecast is in and this year's "Farmer's Almanac" has predicted another brutal Bay State winter. Since the Almanac's forecast for last winter was very accurate, it's not too early for people to plan ahead to winterize their homes and research the energy assistance they may need.

"People with fewer financial resources, such as working families and the elderly, are particularly affected by severe winter weather," explains Stevan Lent, director of the Housing Consumer Education Center at MBHP.

"Many of them may be eligible for winter fuel assistance and don't know it. Fortunately there are several resources where they can easily see if they are eligible for fuel assistance and discount programs."

Do your tenants need assistance with their energy bills?

Energy assistance programs help low-income households and elderly people pay their utility bills during the winter months. People can apply for assistance at a

number of community-based organizations.

Your tenants can call the agencies below to discuss eligibility

and the application process:

- ❖ Heatline, 800-632-8175 or www.massfuelassist.com. Heatline makes referrals to all local fuel assistance agencies in Massachusetts.
- ❖ Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD) administers several weatherization services and fuel assistance programs: 617-357-6012.

Other utility savings programs

If you or your tenants receive food stamps, Social Security, TAFDC, EAEDC, Medicaid, fuel assistance, or veteran's benefits you may be eligible for a discount on your electric, phone, or gas bill. People can contact the companies below to discuss their eligibility. The utilities' Web sites also offer energy-saving tips as well as information on their discount programs:

- ❖ NSTAR (electric and gas): 800-592-2000 or nstaronline.com (click "Your Home").
- ❖ Massachusetts Electric: 800-322-3223 or masselectric.com.
- ❖ KeySpan (gas): 617-469-2300 or keyspanenergy.com.
- ❖ Verizon (phone): the Lifeline and Link-up programs provide assistance with monthly service and installation fees. Call 888-382-6500 for information.

Weatherizing your home or rental unit can dramatically lower fuel bills. Anyone who pays a utility bill can receive a free energy audit from his or her electricity or gas company. The audits book well in advance, so call soon to schedule an appointment.

Households with oil heat can save a significant amount by joining a cooperative. The membership fee is offset by the reduced cost per gallon of oil.

Quick tip ...
To stop cold drafts that drive up heating costs, cover windows with plastic sheeting. Inexpensive window kits are available at most hardware stores.

- ❖ Comfort Crafter Oil Buying Network, 800-649-7473. Annual membership is \$20 or \$7 for low-income families.
- ❖ Massachusetts Energy, 617-524-3950. Members save 15 - 30 cents per gallon of oil. The annual membership fee is \$15 or \$5 for low-income families.

For more information on these or other fuel assistance programs contact the Housing Consumer Education Center at 617-425-6700 or edcenter@mbhp.org, or pick up information at one of our workshops. ❖



Got books?

Are your shelves crammed with books that you or your children don't read anymore? Donate them to MBHP!

Here's why: about 750 clients visit MBHP's office each week and many of them have to bring along their children. To give them something fun to do while they wait, MBHP has started a Reading Corner, where children can select a book to read and even take it home if they want to.

Recently MBHP received more than 400 books from a drive held by Boston Private Bank & Trust. We've also received some books from other donors. However, we can always use more, as the Reading Corner is well-

visited and the children's books go very quickly. Cookbooks and best-sellers are also popular.

We would be happy to take donations of your children's (or any type of books). We can use five, ten, 100, or as many as you would like to bring. Books for young children in English or in Spanish are particularly welcome.

Feel free to drop off books during our office hours or bring them by when you come to a landlord workshop. Questions? Contact Kevin Donaher at 617-425-6702 or kevin.donaher@mbhp.org. ❖



Owner FAQ:

How does MBHP determine the "maximum housing cost?"

When a family selects an apartment with a gross rent (rent plus any utility allowance) that exceeds the payment standard, MBHP must determine whether the family's share for that apartment would exceed the maximum initial rent burden. This share is known as the family's "maximum housing cost."

Federal regulations require that a family's rent share may not exceed 40 percent of its monthly adjusted income when the family **first** moves into an apartment.

Even though the apartment has passed the HQS inspection and the rent requested is "reasonable," a family cannot be approved for an apartment if, after MBHP calculates the amount of subsidy, a family's share would be over 40 percent of its adjusted income.

This federal requirement may not allow the MBHP market analyst to approve the requested rent. Instead, he may offer the landlord a lower rent. This amount is not subject to negotiation. If the property owner cannot accept the rent offer, the family cannot move in.

MBHP staff does advise tenants who are looking for housing what their maximum housing cost is so they do not choose a unit that exceeds the 40 percent cap. Sometimes, however, their income changes and we are not made aware of this until after a request for tenancy approval has been submitted.

If you have questions about the Maximum Housing Cost please contact market analysts Erik Sundsted (617-425-6711, erik.sundsted@mbhp.org) or John Washington (617-425-6661, john.washington@mbhp.org). ❖

Do it yourself, and save

The Building Materials Resource Center (BMRC) is a nonprofit organization that sells pre-used, high-quality building materials. Donations to the center are screened for quality and come from homeowners, construction companies, corporations, distributors, and retailers, among others.

While anyone can shop at the BMRC and take advantage of its low prices, some people's incomes may qualify them for an extra discount. The staff suggests you call to discuss how to verify your eligibility for that discount before visiting the Center. The BMRC's phone number is 617-442-8917.

The Center also offers homeowner support services including home improvement classes, a home consultation service, a do-it-yourself window repair shop, and more. Upcoming classes include:

- ❖ Masonry
- ❖ Wood restoration
- ❖ Kitchen design

The BMRC typically has available:

- ❖ Kitchen cabinets, countertops, sinks, and faucets
- ❖ Bathroom vanities, sinks, faucets, tubs, and toilets
- ❖ Windows: vinyl and wood replacement, insulated double-hung, casements
- ❖ Interior, exterior, and storm doors, plus locks and hinges
- ❖ Carpeting, ceramic and vinyl tile, sheet vinyl, and wood flooring
- ❖ Electrical fixtures
- ❖ Lumber, plywood, and sheetrock

The BMRC is located at 100 Terrace Street, Roxbury, near the Roxbury Crossing T stop on the Orange Line. For more information and to get a complete schedule of upcoming workshops, visit the BMRC online: www.bostonbmrc.org. The BMRC also publishes a handy newsletter, available online. ❖