



Utility Bill Assistance Information

As of 1/29/10

City of Tarpon Springs Water and Sewer Customers: Current Affordability Rate Structure for Seniors, Low-income Customers, and Other Low-Volume Water Users

The City of Tarpon Springs has structured its water and sewer rates so that customers using low or “essential” services are charged lower rates. These “affordability rates” in the water and sewer rate structure help keep essential utility costs low for senior citizens, low-income customers, and all other low-volume water users. The “affordability rate” applies for use up to the first 5 thousand gallons per month to cover essential water and sewer use. The City actually charges about one-half of its own purchased water expense for this affordability rate. In other words, the rate charged to the customer is less than it costs the City to purchase the same volume of water from its supplier.

Other Utility (Energy) Bill Assistance

The following information provides potential ways to save on your utility (energy) bills and available programs for energy bill assistance. Taking into account that energy bills are often 2-3 times as expensive as water and sewer bills, especially for low volume water users, and that any help with monthly expenses will serve the same purpose of leaving more income for other necessities, following are some available programs based upon recent information:

- **Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP):** Assists Pinellas County residents with their home heating and cooling expenses
- **Progress Energy: Energy Neighbor Fund:** provides assistance to customers who are experiencing temporary financial difficulties, such as sudden illness, unexpected unemployment, or an emergency or personal crisis
- **Progress Energy Walk-Through Home Energy Check:** A free energy inspection is conducted at the home by a Progress Energy representative
- **Free information: how to save on and lower your utility bills:** There are numerous, free or low cost steps you can take yourself to save on and lower your utility bills. It is fairly simple to save up to 40% on your utility (energy) bills. Any money saved on utility bills will reduce any need for utility bill assistance

Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

The federal government is providing funding to Florida to increase the size of assistance programs that are available to state residents. Florida will be receiving over \$80 million out of a total federal program of \$2.6 billion that is going to be provided states to help low and moderate income residents pay for their heating bills. The money will be spent over the last three months of the year.

The government program distributing the money is the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). In addition to these most recent funds that will be used to pay for heating bills, the program also offers aid to help families pay their cooling bills.

By the state of Florida and the U.S. government releasing the money now, they are both helping to provide needed energy bill assistance to millions of Americans who otherwise might not be able to afford heat this winter. **This very important program helps to offset seasonal energy costs for low income families, leaving more of their income to use for other necessities.** A part of the program will even provide emergency funds so that people do not have their service shut off.

If you are interested in learning more, or wish to apply for energy bill assistance, contact our local LIHEAP agency, Pinellas County Urban League, Inc. at 727-327-2081.

Assistance Categories

1. Home energy assistance funds pay a designated portion of the client's utility bill directly to the utility company.
2. Crisis assistance funds pay the client's actual utility bill owed up to \$300 and/or other necessary emergency expenses, such as electric fans, in a cooling emergency during the summer months or heaters and blankets in a heating emergency during the winter months.
3. A weather related or supply shortage crisis program may be instituted upon the declaration or order by the Department of Community Affairs, Governor or President that a crisis or emergency exists.

The Pinellas County Urban League received its first LIHEAP funding through the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services in 1992.

Relief for More Than 5000 Residents

During the last fiscal year, the LIHEAP staff assisted over five thousand (5,000+) Pinellas County residents in meeting the cost of heating and cooling their homes. Through the development of a community services network the program is accessible throughout Pinellas County to meet the home energy needs of low-income individuals..

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How do I apply for assistance? How do I get an application to apply for assistance? Eligibility is determined by the local agency providing Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) services in the county in which you live. You must contact them to find out if money is available, how to apply, and how to get an application. There is no web-based LIHEAP application available at this time. You must contact the agency for an application.
2. How do I contact the local agency providing LIHEAP services in my county?

- a. Go to the [Local Providers By County](#) web page
 - b. Look for the county in which you live. The LIHEAP agency name and telephone number are listed under the name of the county
 - c. Call the agency
3. Do I qualify? Eligibility is determined by the local agency providing Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program services in the county in which you live. You must contact them to find out if money is currently available and how to apply. You may qualify for help if your total household income does not exceed the federal [household income limits](#) or if you are currently receiving the following assistance:
 - o Supplemental Security Income
 - o Food Stamps
 - o Applied for and are currently eligible for Community Services Block Grant or Weatherization Assistance Program funds
4. Does LIHEAP pay my bill each month? No. In Florida, LIHEAP assistance is not a monthly benefit. Depending on the funds available in your local area, you may receive assistance up to three times per year. If the demand for assistance is high and funds are not adequate, assistance may be limited to once per year. Contact the LIHEAP provider agency in the county where you live to see if funding is available and how to apply. The amount you could receive will depend on:
 - o Whether you have a home energy crisis (determined by each individual agency)
 - o If you have a home energy crisis, how much it will take to resolve the crisis
 - o The number of people in your household
 - o The total income of all people living in your household
 - o If funds are available
5. Does my utility service have to be disconnected before I can apply for LIHEAP crisis assistance? Most local LIHEAP providers do not require that you be without power before they will help you. Most agencies do require that you have a late payment notice or a disconnect notice. You are encouraged to contact the local LIHEAP agency prior to the date in which your utility services will be turned off. This will hopefully prevent the shut-off and any additional deposit and/or reconnect fees.
6. Does my utility bill have to be listed in my name? Most local LIHEAP providers require that the person applying for assistance be the applicant or they must explain why the bill is not in their name. The bill must be for your house address. You must live in the household and provide proof of residency i.e., rental lease or other bills with your name and address on it.
7. If I qualify for assistance, how are the payments made to my utility company? The LIHEAP provider makes the payments directly to your utility company on your behalf.
8. Does LIHEAP pay for water, sewer or phone utility service? No. The purpose of the LIHEAP program is to assist low-income individuals and households pay their energy bill (heating or cooling costs) only.
9. Will LIHEAP pay my natural gas or propane bill? LIHEAP will pay your natural gas or propane bill only in the winter and only if you use gas or propane as your primary heating source. If you use gas or propane for purposes other than heating only, such as for hot water or cooking, LIHEAP will not pay for it.
10. Are LIHEAP benefits the same in Florida as in other states? Although LIHEAP is a federally funded program, each state is allowed to design its individual program. The benefits and program

designs vary greatly from state to state. Qualifying for LIHEAP in another state does not automatically mean you will be able to receive the same level of help in Florida.

11. I still have questions that were not answered here. Who can help me? The local agency providing LIHEAP services in the county in which you live can answer most questions. Question 2 above explains how you can contact them. If they are unable to answer your questions, you can contact the state office through the following link: [Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program](#).

Progress Energy: Energy Neighbor Fund

Progress Energy's Energy Neighbor fund is an energy-assistance program for our customers. This program provides assistance to customers who are experiencing temporary financial difficulties, such as sudden illness, unexpected unemployment, or an emergency or personal crisis. Energy Neighbor Fund contributions come from Progress Energy's employees, customers, and the Progress Energy Foundation.

With the help of several social service agencies who distribute the funds collected, 100 percent of the money donated to the fund goes directly to helping keep the lights on. The money stays in the communities in which it is collected.

Energy Neighbor Fund Resources in Florida

Pinellas - Salvation Army of St. Pete 727.821.9123 or 822.4954 Religious Community Services
727.443.4031

Progress Energy Walk-Through Home Energy Check

A free energy inspection is conducted at your home by a Progress Energy representative. The representative will survey your home's insulation, duct work, water heating, cooling and heating systems and overall efficiency. You'll then be provided with energy-saving recommendations and practices and other cost-effective energy-saving measures. You can receive more **information** about this program today by **calling Progress Energy Florida at 1-800-700-8744**.

How to save on, and lower, your utility bills.

There are numerous, free or low cost steps you can take yourself to save on and lower your utility bills. It is fairly simple to save up to 40% on your utility bills. Any money you can save on your utility bills will reduce your need for utility bill assistance.

Installing a [programmable thermostat](#) can reduce your heating and cooling costs by up to 20%.

Making your next appliance an [energy efficient appliance](#), can save up to \$400 per year on your energy bills.

CFL bulbs use 1/3 of the energy as a standard light bulb, and [CFL bulbs](#) will save you up to \$30 per bulb installed over the light bulbs lifetime.

Last, but not least, almost one half of the energy used in your home or apartment goes towards heating or cooling it, and you can take a few simple steps to save up to 30% on your overall home [heating and cooling](#) costs. Here are a few other tips to help you lower your utility bills and reduce your need for utility bill assistance.

- *Seal up any leaks.* It is true that house and apartments may have small leaks. Just by sealing and insulating your duct systems you can lower your utility bills costs by as **much as 30 percent**. Weather stripping cracks and caulking gaps around your home are arguably the most cost-effective steps you can take to conserve heat and cooling. You should focus on the basement, attic, windows, and doorways. Also be sure to check near vents, pipes, or electrical conduits that go through the ceiling, wall, or floor.
- *Make ventilation a high priority.* Sealing those leaks does not mean eliminating ventilation. Adequate venting will help avoid indoor air-quality problems and also control moisture. Properly venting and insulating your attic can help **save you up to 20 to 35 percent in heating costs**. You do want to be careful not to block attic vents with insulation. It is also a very good idea to have a cooling and heating technician check your oil fired or gas furnaces, water heaters and dryers, and boilers for proper venting. Some utility companies will do this for free to provide assistance.
- *Wrap insulation blankets around your hot water tank and pipes.* This is really helpful, in particular for an older water heater and this **can save up to 10 percent** on the water heating costs of your utility bill. Do always be sure to leave the air intake vent uncovered when you are insulating a gas water heater.