

**ENERGY PROGRAMS
HAYWOOD ELECTRIC COMPANY'S
HELPING EACH MEMBER COPE PROGRAM**

**EP – 560 HAYWOOD ELECTRIC COMPANY'S HELPING EACH MEMBER COPE PROGRAM
Change #3-2015
December 1, 2015**

560.01 GENERAL INFORMATION

- A. Helping Each Member Cope (HEMC) is funded 100% from monies contributed by Haywood Electric Membership Corporation customers and employees. Allocations are made **only** to counties that have HEMC residential customers (Figure 560-1) and are based on the number of HEMC residential customers in each county. Counties spend the money until the funds are exhausted or until the end of the state fiscal year (SFY). If funds are remaining at the end of the SFY, the money is carried forward to the next SFY.

The following sections of the Energy Programs manual also apply to HEMC:

	Section	Section Number
1	Contracting and Vendor Agreement	120
2	Retention	125
3	Appeals and Hearing Process	135
4	Overpayments and Fraud	140
5	Household Composition	150
6	U. S. Citizenship and Non-Citizens	175
7	Energy Programs Outreach Plan	200
8	Crisis Intervention Program System Instructions	600

- B. Explore the possibility of a HEMC payment prior to providing Crisis Intervention Program (CIP) assistance. (In order to receive CIP funds, a household must be unable to obtain timely or appropriate assistance from other sources.)
- C. Households do not have to heat with electricity to be eligible. The temperature outside is not the sole determining factor for a crisis, it must be linked to a life-threatening or health-related emergency.

560.02 ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- A. Counties must begin taking applications when their HEMC Program allocation is received. (See 560.04.)
- B. A household must be an HEMC residential customer. Accept the applicant's statement, unless questionable. If questionable, view a current service bill to verify that the household is an HEMC customer.
- C. A household must be experiencing a heating or cooling related crisis. Refer to 560.05 for guidelines on how to assess whether a crisis exists.
- D. A household must have countable net income at or below 150% of the current poverty level. (See 560.06.)
- E. Assistance must be authorized within 18 to 48 hours. (See 560.04, E.)
- F. Benefits cannot exceed \$600 per application and \$600 per fiscal year.
- G. There must be a signed vendor agreement where households can receive a HEMC Program payment. (See 560.03.)

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560.03 VENDOR AGREEMENT (See Section 120, Contracting and Vendor Agreement)

The purpose of a vendor agreement is to ensure that the vendor does **not** treat recipients adversely.

County Responsibility For Negotiating Vendor Agreements

Whenever the local county agency chooses to make a voucher or vendor payment or issue a two-party check, it is required to enter into an agreement with the vendor. In some instances, the payment will be to a landlord which makes him an energy supplier. Therefore, a vendor agreement is required.

- A. Vendor Agreements must be renegotiated each year. To ensure that applicants receive benefits without delay, you should negotiate vendor agreements at the time you become aware of a new vendor.
- B. Always use the DSS-8163.
- C. If the DSS-8163 is returned and the vendor has added any addendum or changed any wording, the DSS-8163 is void. You must negotiate a new DSS-8163.
 - 1. Retain the original.
 - 2. Give a copy to the vendor.

560.04 APPLICATION PROCESS

Everyone who wishes to apply must be given the opportunity to apply without delay. The applicant must be allowed to sign an application, DSS-8178, on the day he appears at the local county agency or appears at an agency that is taking applications per the county's plan. (See EP-200.)

A. Acceptance Of Application

Application taking must begin on the first working day of July and continue until the HEMC Program allocation is exhausted or until the end of the current SFY, whichever occurs first.

- 1. The applicant or his representative must apply for the HEMC Program in the county in which the household resides. The applicant must be a resident of North Carolina.
- 2. When you receive a request for assistance by mail or telephone and a crisis is indicated, follow up within one work day to schedule an interview. If the request is made by an individual who would have difficulty coming to a local county agency or outpost office, obtain the information for the application by telephone. (See Section EP-400 for more information regarding telephone interviews.) Mail the person an application to sign. If a life-threatening situation exists, a home visit to obtain the needed information may be necessary if the information can not be obtained by some other means.
- 3. If the applicant or his representative decides not to apply, complete the inquiry. Include as much information about the situation as possible.
- 4. You must research your county files to determine if anyone listed on the DSS-8178 has received HEMC Program funds before.

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B. Who must be included In the application?

The same rules apply as those in the Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP). See Section 150 for instructions on who must be included.

C. Explanation Of Rights and Responsibilities

1. Explain to the applicant he has the right to:
 - a. Receive assistance if found eligible.
 - b. Have any person participate in the interview for determination of eligibility.
 - c. Be protected against discrimination on the grounds of race, creed, or national origin by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. He may appeal such discrimination through Section 504 of the Disability Act.
 - d. Have any information given to the agency kept in confidence.
 - e. Appeal if:
 - (1) He was denied the right to apply for assistance on the same day he or his representative went to the local county agency;
 - (2) His application was denied;
 - (3) His assistance was incorrect based on the county's interpretation of State policy, **or**
 - (4) A decision is not made on his application within 24 to 48 hours.
 - f. Reapply at any time.
 - g. Withdraw from the assistance program at any time.
2. Explain to the applicant he has the responsibility to:
 - a. Provide the local county agency with the necessary information which can be used to locate and obtain information needed to determine eligibility; **and**
 - b. Report immediately to the local county agency the receipt of benefits which he knows to be erroneous. If he does not report such incorrect payments, he may be required to repay any overpayment.
3. Explain the meaning of fraud to the applicant.

D. Completion Of the DSS-8178 During the Application Interview

1. Document the applicant's responses to the questions on the DSS-8178.
2. As part of the interview process, determine what other services may be appropriate to meet the crisis. Document on the DSS-8178 which services were provided.
3. The applicant must sign the DSS-8178.

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E. Eligibility Determination

When you complete the interview, verify all necessary factors of eligibility to determine if the household is eligible.

1. Income

The household meets income eligibility if the household's total countable income is equal to or less than 150% of the current poverty level. Use the chart in Section 400 of the Energy Manual for income limits.

Refer to the Income Section of the Integrated Policy Manual at <https://economicbenefits.nc.gov> for types of income to count, how to verify income and which income deductions and base periods to apply.

2. A crisis situation must exist. See 560.05. However, the temperature outside is not the sole determining factor for a crisis, it must be linked to a life-threatening or health-related emergency.
3. Document eligibility verification on the DSS-8178.
4. Receipt of the HEMC Program benefits does not effect a household's eligibility for LIEAP, CIP, Emergency Assistance, etc.

560.05 CRISIS DETERMINATION AND DOCUMENTATION

A household is in a crisis if it is experiencing or is in danger of experiencing a life-threatening or health-related emergency and sufficient, timely, and appropriate assistance is not available from any other source.

NOTE: The temperature outside is not the sole determining factor for a crisis, it must be linked to a life-threatening or health-related emergency.

A. Crisis Determination

1. Guidelines For Determining If a Crisis Exists

The following guidelines are considered to support a decision that a crisis exists. If the answer to all the questions below is No, the applicant is not experiencing a crisis. If the answer to one or more questions is Yes, it may be determined that a crisis exists. Counties must use prudent judgement. This is not an **all-inclusive** list.

Consider the following guidelines to determine if a crisis exists.

- a. Has the family experienced an event beyond its control?
- (1) The household is experiencing unusual and/or unexpected expenses; **or**
- (2) There is a decrease in the household's income.

NOTE: If there is no unusual and/or unexpected expense, no decrease in the client's income, or if the client has misspent his income, the household may still be considered to be in a crisis situation if the answer to "b." is Yes.

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- b. Is there no source of heating or cooling, or is the source of heating or cooling in jeopardy?
 - (1) The fuel supply is exhausted or terminated;
 - (2) The notice has been received notifying the household of termination of the heating source; **or**
 - (3) The heating source is in need of repair.

- c. Once you determine a crisis exists, you must still determine if payment is needed to meet the crisis, or if there some other way to alleviate the situation?
 - (1) Does the applicant have sufficient resources, such as a savings or checking account, to alleviate the crisis himself?
 - (2) Explore whether other family members may be able to offer assistance or support; **or**
 - (3) Explore with the applicant whether he or a member of the household will have income that can be used to meet the emergency. For example, the applicant has a cutoff notice for electricity but has ten days to pay the bill. In the interview, you determine that the applicant will begin receiving unemployment insurance in five days.
 - (4) Decide whether there are other community resources that can be used to alleviate the crisis.
 - (5) Will the fuel supplier agree to continue service until the applicant receives his next check?
 - (6) Explore if the applicant has a history of being in a crisis situation. If so, it is preferable to use other resources to assist in alleviating the situation. To maximize the \$600 limitation in the HEMC Program, explore all other resources to assist in alleviating the situation.

2. Verification and Documentation

- a. Verify that a crisis exists by either:
 - (1) Accepting the applicant's statement, unless questionable;
 - (2) Viewing bills; **or**
 - (3) Contacting collaterals, such as neighbors, vendors, landlords, etc.

- b. Documentation should include but not be limited to:
 - (1) Date of application;
 - (2) Statement of crisis; **and**
 - (3) Method of verification.

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If you use the applicant's statement, document what he says and the date. When you use other evidence, show the type of document used and the date. When using collaterals, show the collateral's name, date, and statement.

If the DSS-8178 does not allow space for proper documentation, attach additional sheets as needed.

B. Time Frames For Authorizing Assistance

1. Time Frame For Authorizing Assistance When Crisis **Is Not** Life-Threatening

If a household is experiencing a crisis which is not life-threatening, authorize benefits within 48 hours (2 days). This does not mean issuance of benefits, but you must authorize eligibility to alleviate the crisis. These deadlines apply even if another agency is taking the application.

2. Time Frame For Authorizing Assistance When Crisis **Is** Life-Threatening

If a household is experiencing a life-threatening situation, authorize benefits within 18 hours. This does not mean issuance of benefits, but you must authorize eligibility to alleviate the crisis. These deadlines apply even if another agency is taking the application.

C. Notification of Eligibility

1. If assistance is **approved**, use the Data Entry System to complete a DSS-8107.

2. If assistance is **withdrawn or denied**, use the Data Entry System to complete a DSS-8107.

560.06 BENEFIT LEVELS AND LIMITATIONS

A. A household may receive benefits more than one time during a fiscal year which is defined as **July through June**.

B. The maximum benefit that can be paid to a household during a fiscal year is \$600. There is no requirement that a household must receive \$600 in a fiscal year.

C. Benefits may vary based upon the severity of the crisis and the services needed; however, benefits cannot exceed \$600 per application.

D. If more than \$600 is needed to alleviate the crisis, you must:

1. Determine if there are other community resources that can be used in conjunction with the \$600 or by including CIP funds;

2. Negotiate with the vendor to alleviate the crisis for \$600; **or**

3. Counsel the applicant on any available options which can be used. However, apply this option only if you are unable to alleviate the crisis using 1. or 2. above. If you are unable to alleviate the crisis by one of the means listed above, **deny the application**.

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- E. Heating and Cooling Assistance
1. At the time of application, a household may be assisted only as long as the payment does not exceed the maximum benefit allowed per application.
 2. Funds can be used to assist households with reconnection charges.
 3. Funds cannot be used to prevent a crisis.
 4. Funds **are not** to be used for:
 - a. Paying for repairs;
 - b. Purchase of space heaters, etc.; **or**
 - c. Assistance to households whose only crisis is lack of refrigeration.
 - d. Purchasing or installing air conditioners
 - e. Purchasing fans
 - f. Unauthorized or illegal usage fees associated with return checks and/or meter tampering charges.
 5. Funds **can be** used for:
 - a. Paying deposits, or
 - b. Paying heating or cooling bills.

560.07 METHOD OF PAYMENT

- A. Heating or cooling assistance payments must be made in one of the ways listed below. No other payment method is acceptable.
1. County-issued check to the energy provider;
 2. A two-party check written to both the applicant and the energy provider. It must be clear that the check cannot be cashed without the authorized signature of both parties; or
 3. A voucher/vendor payment.
- B. A household may never receive cash assistance to purchase items.

560.08 OTHER SERVICES

See Energy Manual Section EP-200, Energy Programs Outreach Plan, for Linkup and LifeLine Services.