



Giving Hope Today

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Financial assistance program offers help with electricity bill

Newmarket Hydro partners with The Salvation Army to assist low-income consumers with energy costs

Newmarket, Ontario (November 23, 2009):

Newmarket Hydro has established an energy assistance program for qualifying low-income consumers who have fallen behind on their electricity bills. Offering emergency relief to avoid service disconnection, the program covers some of the costs incurred when the electricity bill goes unpaid. It also provides access to the utility's numerous residential conservation activities so that affected consumers can reduce their overall monthly energy costs on an ongoing basis. Funded through Newmarket Hydro, the program is administered locally by The Salvation Army's community and social services network.

Operating all year round, this program provides one-time assistance to deal with costs typically associated with missed electricity bill payments such as late payment charges, collection notices and disconnection fees. In some circumstances, it can also cover up to fifty per cent of the arrears on a bill to a maximum of \$200. Payments are credited directly to the consumer's account with Newmarket Hydro.

To be eligible for support, a residential customer of Newmarket Hydro must be unable to pay the electricity bill and be a low-income senior or be receiving financial help from a recognized assistance program such as Ontario Works or the Ontario Disability Support Program. However, because everyone's situation is different, people who feel they may qualify due to other circumstances are still encouraged to speak with the program administrator, Jane Haslam of The Salvation Army at (905) 895-6119, to determine their eligibility.

"As winter approaches, we recognize that some people with limited incomes will have difficulty meeting their heating costs and simply not be in a position to take advantage of the customary energy efficiency solutions and this makes managing the electricity bill all that much more difficult," says Paul Ferguson, president of Newmarket Hydro. Still, where appropriate, consumers qualifying for this assistance will be encouraged to consider a home energy audit or the utility's other residential conservation programs that could reduce their monthly energy usage.

"Electricity costs alone are not the only burdens carried by low-income households," says Ferguson, "but this program is a response to the serious financial challenges faced by some individuals as a result of seasonal increases in their energy consumption." Through our partnership with The Salvation Army, he says, "our intent is to assist people who because of unpaid electricity bills may be at risk of disconnection and the resulting escalation of costs."

"This program fills an important need in our social services offerings," says Jane Haslam, The Salvation Army's local homelessness prevention coordinator. "It gives us another tool to help the working poor, seniors with limited resources, individuals whose incomes are reduced because of disabilities and those who have found themselves on social assistance due to the economic downturn." To apply for assistance under the program, individuals should contact Jane Haslam directly at (905) 895-6119.