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Governor Rendell says Pa. Making Energy Efficiency Upgrades More Affordable, Saving Consumers Money

HARRISBURG (March 2) -- Pennsylvania is stepping up its efforts to help more families cut their energy bills, said Governor Edward G. Rendell today as he announced an expanded effort to make energy conservation and efficiency measures more affordable for households.

The Governor said the new, \$17 million Keystone HELP Energy Efficiency Loan and Rebate Program will make it easier for families to insulate their homes, seal off drafts, or install things like high-efficiency heating and cooling systems, geothermal heat pumps, and ENERGY STAR-qualified windows and doors.

Governor Rendell said making these improvements now is important for households to avoid the full impact of higher energy costs, especially as the remaining caps on electricity rates expire over the next two years.

“During these difficult financial times, families need to save money anywhere they can,” said Governor Rendell. “Energy efficiency upgrades will reduce their monthly bills now and keep those bills manageable as electricity rates increase.

“By investing in measures that conserve energy, families can save money while being comfortable in their homes and protecting the environment, too. After all, the cheapest, cleanest source of energy is energy that is not used. By giving families and businesses incentives to use energy wisely, Pennsylvania will reduce the need to build expensive new power plants, improve the reliability of our electricity service, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.”

Environmental Protection acting Secretary John Hanger and Treasurer Robert McCord unveiled the new Keystone HELP Residential Energy Efficiency Loan and Rebate Program today at the home of David and Jennifer Schlegel in Lower Allen Township, Cumberland County.

The program, made possible by the \$650 million Alternative Energy Investment Fund legislation Governor Rendell signed in July, is an expansion of the Keystone Home Energy Loan Program, or Keystone HELP, that was created in 2006 by the Pennsylvania Treasury Department to offer affordable energy efficiency financing options.

The Schlegels used a Keystone HELP loan to install a geothermal heating and cooling system in their home in January 2007. They have since saved more than \$1,150 on heating oil annually, and reduced their electric bills for air conditioning and heating water.

Under the new program, the Department of Environmental Protection will provide \$3.5 million to reduce the interest rates on nearly \$16 million in low-interest loans, as well as \$1 million for rebates through the new energy efficiency program. The loan capital is provided by DEP, the state Treasury Department, and the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Authority.

The Schlegels recently contacted an approved Keystone HELP contractor for quotes on a

“whole house” energy audit of their home. Two of the low-interest loans offered through the new program provide a credit of up to \$325 for energy audits when loans are issued for work recommended by certified energy auditors.

Many homeowners will see immediate savings on their energy efficiency investments because of reduced energy consumption with the help of the program, while others will benefit from a shorter payback period on the costs to purchase and make the improvements.

Homeowners will receive the greatest returns on their investments by planning upgrades using a “whole-house” approach that examines the home as an interdependent set of systems for controlling temperature, air flows, moisture and other factors that impact monthly energy bills. Comfort and air quality are also considered.

Energy efficiency professionals contracted through the Keystone HELP program can help homeowners prioritize investments to optimize energy efficiency and maximize savings.

Applications and program guidelines are available at www.keystonehelp.com. The deadline for applications is June 30.

The Governor added that while the new Keystone HELP program and other measures such as energy conservation mandates on utilities will help reduce electricity consumers bills by hundreds of millions of dollars, additional steps must be taken to further mitigate rate increases. Governor Rendell has asked the legislature to consider a three- to four-year phase-in of rate hikes, allowing energy conservation measures to take effect and clean energy sources with stable generation costs to be installed.

“By reducing energy consumption, improving efficiency, and taking advantage of more, clean renewable energy resources that are not subject to price spikes, we can save consumers half a billion dollars over the next five years,” said the Governor. “However, we must do more to alleviate what will be a significant hardship for our businesses and families when electricity rate caps expire statewide.

“Five utility companies, serving the great majority of Pennsylvanians, are still subject to rate caps. When those caps expire, and all of them will by Jan. 1, 2011, our families and businesses will see increases amounting to billions of dollars and be subject to sometimes extreme price volatility.”

For more information on the Keystone HELP Energy Efficiency Loan and Rebate Program, visit www.keystonehelp.com. For more information on funding programs through the Alternative Energy Investment Fund, visit www.depweb.state.pa.us and click on the “Fueling Energy Savings” icon.