

PoweringConnections

Central Hudson's Consumer Outreach Publication

Fall/Winter 2021

New programs offer assistance to customers with unpaid electric and gas bills

Grants of up to \$10,000 are now available

New York state is now offering the Regular Arrears Supplement (RAS) Program and the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP). Both programs can assist Central Hudson's low and moderate-income customers who have unpaid rent or utility arrears.

THE REGULAR ARREARS SUPPLEMENT PROGRAM

RAS is a new program providing up to \$10,000 in utility arrears assistance to eligible households that are unable to pay past due electric and/or gas utility bills. This program is open to homeowners and renters, and can apply to all arrears, including those accrued prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. This program only applies to electricity and natural gas, but not deliverable fuels, such as home heating oil or propane.

Eligible applicants have in-

come that meets the requirements for Family Assistance, Safety Net Assistance, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) or Code A Supplemental Security Income, and received or meet all of the eligibility criteria to receive a Regular HEAP benefit in the current program year. In addition, an eligible applicant's current gas and/or electricity account is in active collections, or otherwise facing disconnection or termination due to unpaid arrears.

RAS is currently available and will remain open to qualified customers until Sept. 30, 2022, or until funding is exhausted. Applicants must apply at their local Department of Social Services office.

THE EMERGENCY RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Low-income customers who rent are eligible for ERAP if, on



or after March 13, 2020, a member of their household received unemployment benefits, experienced a reduction in income, incurred significant costs or experienced financial hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic that resulted in overdue rent at their

current residence.

ERAP includes up to 12 months of rental and utility arrears payments for rents and utility arrears accrued on or after March 13, 2020; and up to three months of additional rental assistance if the household is

expected to spend 30 percent or more of their gross monthly income to pay for rent.

To apply for ERAP, visit <https://NYSrenthelp.otda.ny.gov>.

There are no immigration status requirements to qualify for the program.

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Central Hudson
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CENTRAL HUDSON INSTALLS NEW CUSTOMER SYSTEM

Central Hudson has implemented extensive changes to its customer information systems (CIS). These upgrades have resulted in important changes to your account and should, over time, allow for improved customer service.

Central Hudson is committed to improving customer interactions, whether they take place over the phone, online through the website or via the recently updated mobile app. One of the largest projects to date is currently underway as Central Hudson works to replace its legacy CIS with updated SAP software that will modernize interactions with customers and allow for greater flexibility and service options.

Customers should notice some changes now that the new CIS is live. All customers received a new account number and should be able to view their detailed account histories online. This new, customer-centric system is expected to result in a more seamless experience when using self-service options and should create more efficient interactions between customers and the utility.

“Our existing Customer Information System served us and our customers well for more than 35 years, but the

pace of change is accelerating, and we need to maintain the ability to adapt quickly,” said Anthony Campagiorni, Vice President of Customer Services and Gas Operations at Central Hudson. “Our team is hard at work implementing a new system that establishes a new foundation to serve our customers well for many years to come.”

Customers today have a number of energy supply options, like onsite rooftop solar and renewable community energy subscriptions that can be found on Central Hudson’s Clean Energy Marketplace. These energy supply options will only expand in the coming years, making the billing process more complex. The new SAP system is better equipped to accommodate these growing energy options and associated billing changes. The ability to view a more detailed account history will also allow Central Hudson representatives to recommend energy efficiency incentives and programs that can help customers meet their individual energy needs while reducing their carbon footprint.

“Greater access to customer account information means we’re able to get to know our customers better and provide a more personalized experience that results in more meaningful interactions,” Campagiorni added.



As a result of the implementation of the new CIS system, some customers may experience longer than usual wait times when looking to speak with a customer service representative. For faster service, customers can visit www.CentralHudson.com to find

account information and conduct most transactions. For non-emergency matters that require assistance, customers can reach us via the chat option on the homepage, or submit an inquiry through the form at www.CentralHudson.com/ContactUs.

UTILITY DONATES 700 BAGS OF FOOD FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Members of Consumer Outreach helped the People’s Place in Kingston prepare donations for local families during the holidays.

Central Hudson donated 700 bags and Consumer Outreach filled many of them with cereal, pasta, peanut butter, jelly, pancake mix and other food items. As part of the Bag Holiday Hunger program, these bags will be donated to vulnerable Ulster County families with school-aged children during the holiday recess between Christmas and New Year’s Day. The Bag Holiday Hunger program provides meals to children who typically receive a free lunch at school.

People’s Place was awarded Central Hudson’s Community Partner Award during the Consumer Outreach Forum in October.

ASK SUZANNE

from Community Relations & Consumer Outreach

Q: Given what is happening with the pandemic, is Central Hudson able to be out in the community sharing information with customers? If yes, how do I invite you to an event in my neighborhood?

A: Safety always comes first with Central Hudson! Luckily, right now it is safe for us to attend all outdoor events, and with the proper precautions, many indoor events as well. Central Hudson appreciates the importance of communicating with our customers through all of the ways they receive information: mail, email, phone, social media and at in-person events throughout our community. In fact, in addition to attending events like the LaGrange Fire District safety open house or a Renegades baseball game, we are setting up at ShopRite stores in Newburgh, Poughkeepsie, Kingston and Hopewell Junction once a week, and are also visiting People’s Place in Kingston and Family Services in Poughkeepsie once a week – so that our customers can get answers to their questions and help from us in person. To invite us to an event in your community, please email us at consumeroutreach@cenhud.com. Check us out on Facebook or Twitter to see where we’ll be each week. We look forward to seeing you soon!



Send your customer service questions and we’ll answer them in Powering Connections. Please keep your letters brief, do not send anonymous letters and include your address. Email: consumeroutreach@cenhud.com.

ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS ARE HERE TO HELP YOU

HEAP is open!

Qualified customers can now apply for Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) grants, a federally funded program that provides regular and emergency assistance to help pay heating and utility bills. Applications for HEAP are also available at Offices for the Aging and online at mybenefits.ny.gov.

“We are pleased that additional assistance is available for families in our community who may be struggling, especially as we continue to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Anthony Campagiorni, Vice President of Customer Services and Gas Operations.

Families who qualify for HEAP grants and use electricity or natural gas as their primary heating source may receive a HEAP grant of \$350 or more toward their utility bill, depending on family income and size guidelines. For example, a family of four with natural gas heating and an annual income of \$62,988 would qualify for a \$350 grant.

CENTRAL HUDSON'S LOW INCOME BILL DISCOUNT PROGRAM

Central Hudson customers who receive HEAP grants—or **new this year, qualify for other assistance programs, such as Lifeline, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income, Federal Public Housing Assistance, Veterans Pension or Survivors Pension, and certain programs for Native Americans**—will receive additional bill credits for up to 12 months on their Central Hudson bill. As an example: A Central Hudson customer who qualifies for a Tier 1 HEAP grant and uses natural gas for heating is eligible for bill credits of up to \$30 per month; while a Tier 1 customer who has electric heating can receive a credit of almost \$40 each month. Customers with lower incomes who qualify for higher tiers could be eligible for larger bill credits.

Campagiorni added, “Households receiving a HEAP benefit for non-utility



heating fuels, such as oil, propane, wood/wood pellets, kerosene, coal or corn, are also eligible for a monthly credit on their electric or non-heating gas bill.”

Customers who heat with non-utility heating fuels should email their current Notice of Decision letter to Central Hudson at careunit@cenhud.com to be enrolled and receive the bill credit.

Regular HEAP grants for the fall and upcoming winter are available between Oct. 1, 2021, and March 15, 2022, or

until funding is exhausted. Emergency HEAP grants will be available between Jan. 3, 2022, and March 15, 2022. These benefits are designed to meet an eligible household's immediate energy needs. The Heating Equipment Repair or Replacement (HERR) program is also available to assist customers who have primary heating equipment that is either inoperable or unsafe. HERR grants are currently available and will remain so through Sept. 30, 2022.

AVOID THE SNOW: CHECK YOUR INBOX, NOT YOUR MAILBOX

When the winter chill takes over and the snow starts to pile up, avoid trudging out to your mailbox. **Stay safe and warm with eBills, our FREE online billing service.** With eBills, you can view your bills online from wherever you are and print your bill only when you need to. We'll even notify you when your bill is due so you won't miss a payment. Signing up for eBills also saves trees, time and money. Households billing online save six pounds of paper per year. Save your payment preferences to expedite future transactions and never spend money on stamps to mail in your payments! **Also, sign up for auto payments with your bank account, or credit or debit card. There is no longer a fee for credit or debit card payments.**

Visit our website to sign up for these options today!



PREPARE FOR COLD WEATHER SERVICE HEATING SYSTEMS FOR EFFICIENCY & SAFETY

Central Hudson reminds its customers to take steps to prepare for winter by servicing their heating systems, installing carbon monoxide detectors and becoming more energy efficient. Now that the weather has become cooler, heating systems will be turning on more often. In addition to checking fittings, burners and performing other adjustments, chimneys and exhaust flues should also be cleared of any obstructions, especially after leaves have fallen. Blocked flues and chimneys can prevent exhaust gases from heating systems from venting properly, causing a build-up of deadly carbon monoxide gas in the home.

Carbon monoxide is a colorless and odorless gas produced as a by-product of the faulty burning any fuel, including oil, propane, wood, natural gas and kerosene. Symptoms of exposure include sleepiness, dizziness, nausea, loss of consciousness and even death.

Homes and businesses should be equipped with carbon monoxide detec-



tors as a safety precaution to warn of its presence, and those currently using detectors should replace the batteries regularly. If carbon monoxide is detected, the building should be evacuated, and the cause investigated by a qualified service technician. Occupants should seek medical attention if necessary.

Customers who think they smell natural gas should stop what they are doing, go outside immediately and let us know after moving to another location by calling (800) 942-8274, or emergency responders at 911.

RECIPE

ROASTED APPLES AND BRUSSELS SPROUTS

Apples, red onions and Brussels sprouts are roasted together with avocado or olive oil and balsamic vinegar to create a light and delicious side dish to serve alongside fish, poultry or pork.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 lbs. fresh Brussels sprouts (cut off ends and slice in half)
- 2 apples cored and cut in chunks
- 1 red onion cut in chunks
- 1/3 cup of avocado or extra virgin olive oil
- 3 tbsp. of red balsamic vinegar
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Garlic and onion powder to taste

DIRECTIONS

Step 1: Preheat oven to 425 degrees.

Step 2: Line a baking pan with aluminum foil for easy clean-up.

Step 3: Place Brussels sprouts, apples and red onions in a bowl. Add avocado or extra virgin olive oil, balsamic vinegar and seasoning to taste. Toss the mixture gently to coat.

Step 4: Arrange the ingredients in a single layer on the lined baking pan and bake for 15 minutes, shake or stir the ingredients on the pan and bake an additional 15 minutes.



BE PREPARED FOR STORMS WITH FREE OUTAGE ALERTS

When powerful winter storms strike, we want you to be ready with text alerts. When you sign up for text alerts, you will receive:

- An outage alert by text;
- An estimated time of restoration, so you can plan;
- A notice when power is restored; and more!

Text alerts are a free and easy-to-use service that will keep you up-to-date on outage situations anytime, anywhere. Sign up by texting REG to 236483 (Cen-Hud). You can even check your balance or pay bills. Go to www.CentralHudson.com/Alerts for more information.



GENERATOR SAFETY

When using generators during electric service interruptions, be sure that the unit is operated safely in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions, and follow these safety tips:

- Generators should be sized to meet the needs of the appliances they are connected to. If the generator is too small, appliances can be damaged and the generator can overheat, creating a fire hazard.
- Do not operate generators in an enclosed area such as a basement, garage, shed or enclosed porch, as this may cause a build-up of deadly carbon monoxide gas.
- To avoid electrocution, keep the generator dry and do not use in rain or wet conditions. Operate it on a dry surface under an open canopy-like structure and do not touch it with wet hands.
- Be sure to turn the generator off and let it cool down before refueling. Gasoline spilled on hot engine parts could ignite.

- Store fuel for the generator in an approved safety can and outside of living areas in a locked shed or other protected area. To guard against accidental fire, do not store it near a fuel-burning appliance, such as a natural gas water heater in a garage.
- Never try to power the house wiring by plugging the generator into a wall outlet. Known as "backfeeding," this practice puts utility workers, your neighbors and your household at risk of electrocution.

