

Community

4 The Houston Sun September 16, 2008

Consumer services available post Hurricane Ike

Emergency Food Stamp Program

From HHSC

Texas will be providing emergency food stamps to Hurricane Ike victims who qualify and will automatically replace benefits for program participants in the storm's path. The Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) sought and received a federal waiver to make the emergency assistance available to low-income individuals and families living in any of the 29 counties that have been declared disaster areas.

"We know that many Texans saw an unexpected loss of income this month because Hurricane Ike disrupted their jobs, their workplaces and their lives," said Texas Health and Human Services Executive Commissioner Albert Hawkins. "Those Texans may now qualify for special hurricane assistance to provide food for their families while they get back on their feet."

Eligible Texans in disaster areas can receive up to two months of food stamp benefits by calling 2-1-1 or applying at any HHSC benefits office through Oct. 17. The person submitting the application needs to provide proof of identity and residence, such as a driver license, and answer questions about household income and resources. A family of four earning up to \$2,915 this month may qualify for assistance. Applicants also will have to answer questions about their bank account balances and other assets. People who provide additional documentation may qualify for benefits for a longer period.

The federal waiver applies to Angelina, Austin, Brazoria, Chambers, Cherokee, Fort Bend, Galveston, Grimes, Hardin, Harris, Houston, Jasper, Jefferson, Liberty, Madison, Matagorda, Montgomery, Nacogdoches, Newton, Orange, Polk, Sabine, San Augustine, San Jacinto, Trinity, Tyler, Walker, Waller and Washington counties. Additional areas may be added later as damage assessments continue.

Current food stamp recipients living in the areas declared a disaster as listed above will automatically get replacement benefits for a portion of their September benefits. In addition residents in Rusk and Leon Counties will also receive a replacement for a portion of their September benefits due to extensive power outages in that area. The replacement benefits will help more than 500,000 Texans in areas where power outages or flooding are likely to have damaged or destroyed a family's food supply.

Food stamp benefits are placed on a Lone Star card that food stamp recipients use like a credit or debit card to purchase groceries. Food stamp recipients in counties declared a disaster area do not need to visit an office for the replacement benefits, which will automatically be placed on their Lone Star cards later this week. The federal

government also granted permission for hurricane victims to use food stamps to purchase hot ready-to-eat foods. These items, which are not normally allowed under federal rules, will help families who are unable to return to their homes immediately.

For hurricane victims outside the 31 counties receiving replacement benefits, the U.S. Department of Agriculture gave the state permission to give food stamp recipients 20 days - twice the normal amount of time - to report if they lost food in the storm. These food stamp recipients will need to contact their local HHSC benefits office to report the loss of food and apply for replacement benefits. Once the state verifies that the family lived in an area that flooded or lost power for an extended period of time, the state can issue replacement food stamp benefits to the family.

Texans can find the locations of HHSC benefits offices by calling 2-1-1 or visiting www.hh.sc.state.tx.us. People are encouraged to call 2-1-1 or the office number to verify that the office is operating because many benefits offices remain without power.

HHSC is working to establish alternate office locations and applications methods for people in areas hardest hit by Ike. These locations and application options will be posted on the HHSC website, www.hh.sc.state.tx.us, as they become available.

FEMA Assistance

To register for FEMA assistance, call 1-800-621-3362 or visit www.fema.gov.

Blue Roof Program

To qualify for BLUE ROOF services, damage to the roof must be less than 50 percent and the area to be covered must be structurally sound for a crew to work on.

The Blue Roof Program of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers should be open soon. Call 1-888-766-3258.

Insurance Claims information

Texas Department of Insurance: TDI has information for consumers about hurricane preparation insurance tips. Visit the Consumer Resource page on the website at http://www.tdi.stat.tx.us/consumer/storms/c_pmhurrike.html. TDI's toll-free consumer help line (1-800-252-3439) is maintaining extended hours, operation Monday-Friday 8 a.m. - 7 p.m. Saturday 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Sunday 1 to 7 p.m.

Attorney General Consumer Hotline

The Office of the Attorney General has announced extended hours during the emergency for its Consumer Complaint Hotline (800)252-8011. Consumers can call between the extended hours of 9 a.m. - 9 p.m. to report price gouging on necessities, including gro-

ceries, clothing, medical supplies, lodging, repair work and fuel during and after such crises. Complaints can be made on-line 24 hours per day, 7 days per week on the OAG website. The website can be accessed at <http://www.oag.state.tx.us/>.

211 Information AND REFERRAL LINE

The statewide 2-1-1 telephone network is operational again as an information and referral line. Those calling 2-1-1 can get Hurricane Ike-related information, including road closures, shelter information, mental health services, health-related service centers and FEMA procedures. All Texas residents can now call 2-1-1 for any questions related to recovery from Hurricane Ike.

YMCA Openings

Houston-area YMCA facilities that have power are opening their doors to the community for showers and battery charging. Even if you do not have a YMCA membership, you may go to any open YMCA and charge your cell phone and laptop or take a shower.

So far, power has been restored to 13 YMCA facilities, 10 of which have showers available for public use. The YMCA is opening facilities daily as power is restored and damage to buildings is repaired. The following YMCAs newly opened today:

M.D. Anderson Family YMCA, 705 Cavalcade, Houston, TX - 713-697-0648

Trotter Family YMCA, 1331 Augusta Drive, Houston, TX - 713-781-1061

Westland Family YMCA, 10402 Fondren Rd., Houston, TX - 713-771-8333

The following YMCAs are also open:

Clay Road Family YMCA, 10655 Clay Road, Houston, TX - 713-467-9622

T.W. Davis Family YMCA, 911 Thompson Highway, Richmond, TX - 281-341-0791

E.A. Smith Family YMCA, 14650 Highway 3, Webster, TX - 281-486-9622

Huntsville Family YMCA, 291 Highway 75 N., Huntsville, TX, (no shower facilities at this location), 936-295-8009

Katy Family YMCA, 22807 Westheimer Parkway, Katy, TX - 281-392-5055

Langham Creek Family YMCA, 16725 Longenbaugh, Houston TX - 281-859-6143

San Jacinto Family YMCA, 1716 Jasmine, Pasadena, TX - 713-473-9441

Texas Medical Center YMCA Child Care Center, 5614 H. Mark Crosswell Jr. St., Houston, TX (no shower facilities at this location) 713-747-2173

Weekley Family YMCA, 7101 Stella Link Blvd., Houston, TX - 713-664-9622

YMCA International Services, 6300 Westpark Dr., Houston, TX (no shower facilities at this location) 713-339-9015

Alief Family YMCA, 7850 Howell-Sugarland, Houston - 281-495-9100

Cypress Creek Family YMCA, 19915 State Highway 249, Houston - 281-469-1481

South Montgomery County Family YMCA, 6145 Shadowbend Pl., The Woodlands - 281-367-9622

People must bring their own towels, shower shoes and toiletries to use showers; YMCA facilities are unable to provide those items. All children (15 years of age or younger) entering YMCA facilities must be accompanied by an adult, without exception.

Cell phones or other items needing to be charged may not be left unattended. The YMCA cannot be responsible for lost or damaged items. Special thanks to Reliant Energy, who will be providing power strips to the YMCA for this effort.

Hours at each location vary based on area curfews and staff availability. Please contact your local YMCA for individual hours.

Current YMCA members are welcome to use any open facility until their home YMCA reopens. The YMCA plans to reopen more facilities each day as power is restored and damage is repaired at each location. The majority of the YMCA of Greater Houston's facilities were damaged and/or left without power after the storm.

Volunteer Hotline

New volunteer hotline for the city of Houston for volunteers or nonprofit agencies: 713-853-8802 operating Mon-Fri, 9 a.m.-6 a.m.; Sundays, 11 a.m.-6 p.m.

Important Numbers

Centerpoint: (713) 207-2222 Report ONLY Power Lines Down/Reporte líneas caídas

Social Security Assistance: 1-800-772-1213 (if you haven't received your assistance / si no ha recibido su asistencia)

TXDot: 713-802-5076 or 1-800-452-9292 (Road Closures/ Cierre de Calles)

FEMA: 1-800-621-FEMA (3362) or www.fema.gov (Housing Assistance / Asistencia de Vivienda)

Red Cross 713-313-5286 (Shelters/Albergues) Missing Persons/Personas Perdidas: 713-313-1656

Report Price Gouging / Reportar Estafas: 1-800-252-8011 or/o 713-755-2648

SPCA Pets / Mascotas: 713-861-0161

PoD Locations/Sitios Distribución: 713-881-3100

Debris/Escombros: 1 (800) 207-2325 (How to Set up Debris for Disposal & pickup schedule/ Cómo juntar sus escombros para que sea recogidos y las horas previstas)

GREATER COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH
 REVEREND W. C. LAUDER, II, PASTOR/SHEPHERD
 WORSHIP LOCATION: 4710 GRIGGS HOUSTON, TX 77021
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SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2008 @ 3:30 PM
 GOD'S WAY FELLOWSHIP MINISTRIES
 PASTOR ANTHONY CAIN

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2008 @ 3:30 PM
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