

WAP Corner: Weatherization Works in...Virginia!

by Elizabeth Hedstrom

"With gas and oil prices going through the roof, people's wallets are being hit hard as they try to take care of their families. The Virginia Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP), operated by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, in conjunction with the Community Housing Partners Corporation (CHPC) cuts through the bureaucratic red tape to help make a difference in the lives of real people in need."

This is just one of several excellent comments made by Congressman Jim Moran (D-VA) during his visit to the home of Mrs. Rachele Greene earlier this month to witness Weatherization in action in Virginia. Congressman Moran was the invited guest of the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and the Community Housing Partners Corporation (CHPC) – the Weatherization service provider for Northern Virginia – at a site demonstration to see Weatherization services being installed on Mrs. Greene's mobile home in Alexandria, VA. Mrs. Greene, a working mother and sole supporter of her children and disabled husband, had been struggling with energy bills caused by an outdated central heating system and the need for improvements to her home. And the Congressman got an eyeful of what Weatherization is all about in Virginia!

Bill Shelton (Director of DHCD), Floris Weston (VA's WAP Director), and Bill Beachy (Vice President of Energy Services for CHPC) guided Congressman Moran on the tour of Mrs. Greene's home while the crew demonstrated how to install a variety of residential energy efficiency improvements including furnace replacement, stove replacement, underbelly insulation, sealing air leaks, and insulating the hot water system. NewsChannel8, one of the local news providers for the greater Washington, DC metropolitan area, covered the event. Their report gave excellent insight into the effect of the WAP on the families helped by the Program and the positive benefits enjoyed by the communities involved.

Congressman Moran is a senior member of the House Appropriations Committee. NASCSP commends Congressman Moran for his leadership in continuing his support of the WAP. We would also like to congratulate the Virginia Weatherization staff at both the state and local levels – Bill Shelton, Floris Weston, Tom Andrews, Tamra Talmadge-Anderson, Bill Beachy, and the entire CHPC crew. Their hard work and commitment to excellence created a successful demonstration for the Congressman and a great public information event for the entire WAP network.

SITE DEMONSTRATION SET-UP

As we head into the summer months, the WAP continues to help low-income families around the country. As the exceptional work of the Virginia state and local Weatherization staff has shown us, site demonstrations are as important now as they are in the fall. They are one of the best ways to showcase the benefits of the Program to select national, state, and local community leaders. For these demonstrations to be successful, you must select the right home and have the proper tools.

The house should be located in an easily accessible location in a city (or town) to make travel as quick and easy as possible for the public officials and other guests. Approximately 10 people (no more) can comfortably view the various demonstrations at the job site.

The site demonstration should be less than an hour in length and limited to no more than 10 guests. These limits show respect for the participants' busy schedules and the belief that smaller groups offer a greater opportunity to concentrate on the technical aspects of the Program without the interference and distraction. The customer must be willing to have about 10 people come by for an hour to look at the work and not be upset by the distraction.

Morning demonstrations seem to work the best and are the most convenient for the homeowners, crews, and the guests.

The site demonstrations can be hosted by local agencies or the state office. Regardless of who hosts, the event should be "localized", allowing community leaders an opportunity to interact with their constituents.

The site demonstrations are technical in nature and the event must not be allowed to become an "open house". Local agency staff should be limited to the Board President, Executive Director, Weatherization Coordinator, and the Weatherization crew. Strict adherence to this concept will provide a solid framework and help project a well-organized public perception.

Invitations to the press must be carefully distributed. Often the press can have a disruptive presence as they try to get camera angles or seek a usable "sound bite." Newspaper coverage will normally have the best, most lasting effect. This media outlet usually provides more space for a full explanation of the Program.

The agenda for the demonstration starts with the introduction of the guests to the homeowner. A brief overview of the Program from the national, state, and local perspectives is usually provided. Guests are then shown blower door and duct diagnostics, furnace efficiency testing, CO testing, ductwork repair, and window sealing. Throughout these demonstrations, the Weatherization crew can install insulation into the attic and sidewalls.

The following are just a few examples of who you may want to invite to the site demonstration: Agency Board President or designee, your U.S. Congressman for the majority of your service area, the U.S. Senators for the state, the State Senator for the jurisdiction where the site demonstration is being held, the State House Representative(s) for the jurisdiction where the site demonstration is being held, the President of the County Commissioners where the site demonstration is being held, and key gas and/or electric utility representatives from companies serving the area.

OTHER THINGS TO REMEMBER

When preparing your invitation list and identifying public officials, remember that crowd control is crucial for a successful site demonstration. A group of 8-10 guests is ideal.

Obviously not all people invited will be able to attend. All invitees will need to be reminded two or three times – but planning should always allow for no more invited guests than the demonstration area can easily accommodate.

Normally, if Members of Congress agree to attend, they will send a staff person as their representative. One way to increase the odds of their attendance is to contact their Appointment Secretary early and explain the event.

It is very important for your office to call your guests the Friday or Monday before the event. This follow-up call will remind them of the date and time, certify that they have the directions and know where the site is, answer any questions, and reassure staff that the demonstration will NOT run over one hour. Busy people have very heavy schedules, short memories, and may forget otherwise!

Virginia's recent site demonstration is just one of many successful events sponsored by state and local WAP agencies in support of the Program. These events help educate those officials in attendance about the work you do and the lasting effect you have on the lives of the low-income families you serve. Don't be afraid to show off your work. Plan a demonstration project today! For more on Site Demonstrations, visit the WAPTAC web site at www.waptac.org and view the area on Public Information. You'll be glad you did!