

WAP Corner: Weatherization Day – Is It That Time of Year Already?

by Robert Adams and Elizabeth Hedstrom

Information, information, information! We live in a time when we can get information about almost anything, anywhere, anytime. Internet access from your phone, your car, or anywhere thanks to wireless connections. News streams on your computer or fed into a listening device in your ear. Newspapers you receive electronically wherever you are. Radio stations that play only the music you want to hear 24 hours a day. Daily television programming you can stop and start. No matter how you receive information, someone has made it easy and convenient for you to get it all day, every day.

Information about the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) is also more available than ever before. Newsletter articles appear almost daily about the Program. An MSN Internet search for “weatherization” returns nearly 104,000 references. Using Google to find the WAP returns more than 151,000 references. These search results are 4 to 5 times greater than five years ago - thanks to everyone in the network working hard to increase the press and the presence of the WAP in their communities. The word is really starting to get out about this great Program we serve. And we can't stop.

As summer speeds past, we should be increasing our efforts to get the word out about the WAP and preparing for our 2005 Weatherization Day celebration events in October. Sometime next month, the network will receive its newest version of the WAP Public Information Campaign kit, along with tools, templates, and resources to continue your excellent work in educating the public about the benefits of WAP and why the Program needs and deserves their support.

While you're waiting for the kit to arrive, there are things you can do now. One of the best information exchanges between the Program and those who need to know what we do takes place at “site demonstrations.” Putting on a site demonstration is a very useful activity, not only for your state and local agencies but for the entire WAP network. It may interest you to know that most Members of Congress are at home during the month of August and are more likely to be available to visit a job site during this time. These next four to five weeks present a great opportunity to educate national, state, and local policymakers by showing them what you do and how technically advanced the WAP has become.

Continuing to share the stories of the good work done by the Program and showing how we achieve our outstanding results can only help to solidify the good support we are experiencing towards the Program.

Need some tips on how to get started? For these demonstrations to be successful, it is important to guide the outcome in your favor. To do this, you must select the right home and have the proper tools. Here are just a few tips from the Public Information kit that can help you get started:

Site demonstrations should be hosted by local agencies since “localized” events are deemed more useful for community leaders - allowing them an opportunity to interact with their constituents.

Site demonstrations are technical in nature and the event must not be allowed to become an "open house" or an event for non-Weatherization activities. Local agency staff should be limited to allow greater access to the site by the invited guests.

Invitations to the press must be carefully distributed. No press conference should be held. 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.

The agenda for the demonstration should start with the introduction of the invited guests to the homeowner. A brief overview of the Program from the national, state, and local perspectives is provided. Guests are then shown blower door and duct diagnostics, furnace efficiency testing, CO testing, ductwork repair, and window sealing. **Special note:** carbon monoxide testing, insulation installation, and blower door diagnostics always seem to get the attention of the guests.

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

The site demonstration should be less than an hour in length. This limit shows respect for the participants' busy schedules. Also, smaller groups offer a greater opportunity to concentrate on the technical aspects of the Program without the interference and distraction.

Always have a "bad weather plan" to include demonstrations from the porch or under tarp.

The Public Information kit contains several examples of planning guides, sample invitations, scheduling charts, criteria for suitable home selection, and a sample agenda along with other useful templates and tips. Don't wait until next month to receive these helpful tools for planning and executing your site demonstration. You can access these documents right now on the WAPTAC website at www.waptac.org.

WAP is still a "best kept secret" to many in Washington, DC, in your state, and around the country. Our public information efforts are starting to make a dent in the wall of ignorance about this excellent public/private partnership – and more is needed. Congress is showing greater support by increasing our 2006 funding in the Energy and Water Appropriations bill and re-authorizing the Program in this year's Energy Bill. Both the Senate and the House have passed their version of these bills. We are awaiting Conference Committee action on both bills before they can be jointly passed and sent to the President for signature. This action probably won't occur until after the August recess of Congress.

Information remains the key to our success and we must take every opportunity to pass public information along about the WAP to those who need it. Wouldn't it be great if Senators and Congressman were invited to site demonstrations at home next month so they could learn first-hand about the WAP?