Gas Assistance Program for Poor and needy

City of Corpus Christi

TO Leo Guerrero, Council Member, thru
Edward Martin, City Manager

Date October 24, 1984

FROM Leah Olivarri, Director of Administrative Services Leah Olivarri

SUBJECT Gas Assistance Program

As you requested, we have reviewed the possibility of establishing a Gas Assistance Program. Our review included contacting other cities and private gas companies in the State. Based on this review and discussions with you, we recommend that a Gas Assistance Fund be established to assist low income customers with their gas bills.

Based on the information provided by the City of San Antonio, which operates a similar program called "Project Warm," one of the key elements is a campaign for funds lead by the City Council. This campaign would involve the City Council members and other community leaders contacting local companies and individuals for donations to the Gas Assistance Fund.

Since the City does not presently operate a similar type of social service program, we recommend that the funds be distributed to one or more local agencies presently involved in similar operations. For example, the Nueces County Department of Human Services, Catholic Charities, and Nueces County Community Action Agency, all provide assistance to individuals unable to pay their electric or gas bills. Utilizing these existing agency structures would avoid duplication and unnecessary administrative cost. As we do now, we would refer individual customers to these agencies.

Another key element in establishing this type of program is a marketing strategy and brcchures. The strategy would develop the program's identity and list of possible contributors. Brochures oriented toward the possible contributor as well as the customer who may need assistance would be produced. We believe this process would require approximately six weeks.

We anticipate that the cost involved in developing and initially advertising the program should not exceed $5,000. We are excited about the potential for a Gas Assistance Program and would be happy to begin development, if the City Council approves and supports this effort.

Please let me know if we can provide additional information.

Dator - I would like your public support on this program I am purposing in hopes of helping the poor, elderly and handicap

City of Corpus Christi

FILE COPY

TO Leo Guerrero, Councilmember

Date October 4, 1984

THRU: Edward A. Martin, City Manager

FROM Leah Olivarri, Director of Administrative Services

SUBJECT Customer Assistance for Payment of Gas Bills

Several weeks ago you requested that we review the possibility of the City getting involved in a Gas program designed to help customers pay their gas bills.

The City of Corpus Christi presently has an assistance program for customers that cannot pay their winter gas bills. The Public Utility Office has an excellent program where they average payments for customers that cannot afford high monthly bills in the winter. A payment plan is set up for these customers based on the average monthly bill for the year before. The winter months and summer months hopefully balance out and the City is able to recover the payment that is due. Meanwhile, the customer can budget a fixed amount per month for gas services, thereby, avoiding high gas bills in the winter.

One other thing that needs to be taken into consideration is that the City is very lenient in collecting past due accounts, and in cutting off services for non-payment. The City will never, or at least we are not suppose to, cut off Gas service during freezing weather. Admittedly though, once the cold weather is over, the customer still faces payment of the high gas bill.

In our community, there are a number of organizations which provide assistance to individuals unable to pay their utility or gas bills. These include:

1. Nueces County Department of Human Services
2. Catholic Charities and other church charitable organizations
3. Nueces County Community Action Agency
4. State Comptroller of Public Accounts

We do refer individual customers who are unable to pay their bills to these agencies for assistance. The above organization examine each individual family and if they fall under a certain income level, they issue payment on a portion of the utility and/or gas bill.

In addition to looking at our present programs, the Gas Division also checked with other companies throughout the State. There are a number of different types of assistance programs being utilized in cities throughout the State. Of course, it is important to remember that many of the gas companies are privately, rather than publicly, held.

After reviewing our present programs and those in other cities, we would recommend the following actions to assist customers during the coming winter months:

1. Publicize and emphasize our present Average Payment Program; and,

2. Have the City Council lead a campaign for establishment of a Gas Assistance Program. This campaign would allow the City Council and other community leaders to contact influential people and large companies and encourage them to donate to a Gas Assistance Program. These funds would then be distributed at the various social service agencies for assistance to customers. The City could collect the money made by separate donations. This type of program was a success in San Antonio with the help from the Mayor and City Council who solicited separate donations through the media.

In both of these recommendations, the emphasis on publicizing our present programs and having community leaders, such as the City Council, actively solicit donations for a new assistance program. Staff would, of course, work to coordinate our activities with the social service organizations in the City.

Please let me know if you require any additional information or have any questions.

Doctor
Hector
Garcia