

## **FACTS ABOUT OPERATION WEATHER SURVIVAL**

**2008 Chairman:** Debbie Fagin, United Way of Greater St. Louis

**2008 Vice Chairman:** Jim Kramper, National Weather Service, St. Louis, MO

**2008 Secretary:** Anneliese Stoever, St. Louis Area Agency on Aging

### **OWS Background**

Operation Weather Survival (OWS) is a network of public and private organizations that coordinate resources and educate the public to prevent illness and death caused by extreme hot or cold weather. The organization also serves as a “think tank” to help participating agencies solve problems and initiate new ideas. OWS itself does not provide services. Services and programs are provided and administered by member organizations.

OWS began in 1982 as a formal contract between the city of St. Louis and several social service agencies. Eventually, it became a broader group of public health, government, human service, utility and for-profit companies and agencies. In 1996, a more formal structure was initiated to assure the continuation of the organization. A facilitator for OWS is provided by the United Way of Greater St. Louis. OWS now includes St. Louis City, St. Louis County, St. Charles County, and Jefferson County. All other surrounding counties are invited to take part and attend meetings.

### **OWS Programs:**

The major programs of heat illness prevention through OWS, in addition to the monitoring, warning, education and data collection system of the Health Departments are:

#### **Coordination of Cooling Sites**

Staying cool when area health officials have declared a hot weather health advisory is essential. St. Louis area residents can call 1-800-427-4626, the United Way of Greater St. Louis Information and Referral Services, to locate a cooling site, air conditioners and assistance with heat-related problems.

A cooling site is an air conditioned building (public or private) whose management is committed to opening its facility to a segment of the public during periods of severe hot weather. Unless otherwise noted, all sites are open to the general public.

In addition to cooling sites, several agencies provide transportation services during heat advisors, warnings and emergencies. Only the disabled, seriously ill, elderly or adults with young children should use these services:

### **Monitoring the Air Conditioning Program**

The air conditioning program loans free air conditioning units to medically disabled and/or low-income individuals in the St. Louis area. To qualify, recipients must pass a needs test or have proof from attending physicians that they require air conditioning for medical reasons. Recipients are also eligible for a grant from AmerenUE's Dollar More program to help pay energy bills.

Customers should call Human Development Corporation at 314-535-7633 for an application. Home Services, Inc. installs the units, usually in early June. That phone number is 314-531-9779.

### **Air conditioning program continued**

The air conditioning program is coordinated by Home Services Inc., a not-for-profit organization that provides, among other services, energy conservation assistance to elderly and physically disabled persons, and by OWS.

By donating air conditioning units, AmerenUE began its partnership with Home Services, Inc. in 1988 to offer low-income youth training in repairing and installing air conditioning units. The youth also weatherize each room where they install each air conditioner by putting plastic on windows, caulking, and weather-stripping around doors and windows (they create a comfort zone in the rooms where they install the unit).

During the past 16 years, using a variety of local businesses, such as Marco Sales, Inc., Home Depot and the current provider, Carroll Services, Inc., OWS, along with Ameren UE's contribution, has installed more than 500 window units in the homes of medically needy individuals or families.

### **Other programs offered by OWS members include:**

- Home weatherization for low-income elderly and disabled persons.
- Energy assistance for low-income elderly, families and the disabled.
- Information and referral for help, including home visits to high risk individuals and transportation to services, by a number of agencies.
- Emergency shelter through the St. Louis Homeless Network.
- System of neighborhood institutions, primarily senior citizen centers, that offer air-conditioned relief from the heat for the hottest part of the day.
- Information to St. Louis media and help them disseminate critical safety messages throughout the community.