

Heating Initiative Delivers Energy Savings Along With Oil

Over the last five winters, Citizens Energy has worked with CITGO Petroleum to provide heating oil to thousands of residents of tenant-owned cooperatives in New York City. But the program not only heats homes, it also cuts energy costs while reducing harmful greenhouse gas emissions in the fight against global warming.

As part of its heating grants to almost 800 low-income co-ops, Citizens Energy uses heating oil donated by CITGO to finance the installation of energy-savings technologies that cut heating costs for years into the future. While two-thirds of the funds are used to purchase oil for the apartment complexes, the remaining third buys such energy upgrades as more efficient burners and boilers, new lighting and insulation, and temperature control systems.

The idea is to ensure that as much energy as possible is used to actually warm the units and not simply wasted. The cost savings can run as high as 25 percent while cutting the emissions of thousands of tons of carbon dioxide gas every year.

In 2008, over 3.3 million gallons of heating oil were donated to 760 buildings in the five boroughs of New York. The fuel heated the homes of about 75,000 residents, many of them struggling to maintain their buildings as affordable housing in a very expensive market. The oil contribution, worth almost \$10 million, went back to tenants in the form of \$8.1 million in rebates while the remainder was used to upgrade heating and temperature control systems to produce annual savings of over 7 million gallons of oil. That means buildings in the program consumed 171,000 fewer barrels of oil annually and released 55,000 fewer tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

Two of the largest complexes in the program – Riverview, a 383-unit building in the Bronx; and Lands End, with 490 units in Manhattan – invested their conservation funds into Energy Management System upgrades. By placing wireless sensors throughout the buildings, the system triggered the delivery of only enough heat to maintain the desired temperature. In older systems, a ground-floor thermostat controlling temperature to the entire building typically overheats upper floors as heat from lower units rises through ceilings, stairwells and airshafts.

In 2008, Lands End cut their fuel consumption by 90,635 gallons of oil, reducing the release of carbon emissions into the environment by 1,010 tons. Riverview saved 71,517 gallons and reduced carbon emissions by 797 tons.

In 2008, Waldo Gardens, a 175-unit high rise in the Bronx, used energy-efficiency funds on boiler repairs and the replacement of common-area light fixtures. The boiler repairs alone saved 5118 gallons of oil, reducing carbon emissions by 57 tons.

Another Bronx residence, a 37-unit building on Fulton Avenue, upgraded lighting fixtures and hot water pipe insulation and saved 468 gallons of oil in the first year.

Vivian Davis, 85, says upgrades have changed the building for the better.

“New spotlights installed in the front of the building have cut down on robberies. People were breaking into cars. We’ve only had two break-ins since they were installed in 2008, before we had break-ins about 2 or 3 times a week,” says Vivian, who was elected Fulton Avenue board president nine years ago.

She also notes a tremendous improvement in the buildings heating oil expenses. “Back in 2006-2007, we were spending \$9,000 buying oil every 10-12 days. Now we don’t pay for oil until after April 30.”

The Morrisania Revitalization Corp, a 16-unit building located on East 163rd Street in Manhattan, repaired insulation cracks and installed low-flow shower heads and waterproofing. They also insulated pipes, completed roof repairs, installed flood lights and upgraded fluorescent fixtures. Like Fulton Avenue, Morrisania saved almost 500 gallons of oil, while reducing carbon emissions release by five tons.

Donna Green, 48, manager of the Morrisania building, has been a part of the management team for the past 13 years. Donna has lived in a home where she had to front most of the energy bills, so she knows firsthand how much a more energy efficient home can save.

“I think our upgrades will save us a lot of money for years to come. Since we supplied our tenants with energy efficient bulbs a while ago, we now advise them to use the bulbs in their homes all the time,” says Green.

