

---

## **News release**

July 10, 2007

### **Alberta Ombudsman Recommendations Accepted by Alberta Agriculture and Food**

Edmonton...The Alberta Ombudsman, G. B. (Gord) Button, released his report today on his investigation of the Remote Area Heating Allowance Program (the Program) of Alberta Agriculture and Food (the Department). The Program was established under the *Natural Gas Rebates Act* in 1980 to assist rural Albertans who do not have access to natural gas service under the Rural Gas Program. Under the Program, applicants receive a rebate of 25 percent of the cost of their heating fuel purchase (propane or fuel oil) to a maximum natural gas equivalent of 450 gigajoules a year. A previous investigation concluded a complainant was unfairly denied rebate compensation on propane purchases by the Department because written notification of regulation changes reducing the time limit from two years to one year to file a claim were not provided to all known applicants. The Department identified other applicants that may have been similarly unfairly treated.

As a result, the Alberta Ombudsman conducted an own motion investigation pursuant to Section 12(2) of the *Alberta Ombudsman Act*. This investigation focused on the administrative fairness of the process established and implemented by the Department to identify those applicants who should be reconsidered for rebate compensation under the Program.

This investigation was conducted with the full cooperation of the Minister and staff of Alberta Agriculture and Food. The review process developed by the Department and supported by the Alberta Ombudsman identified a significant number of citizens who may have been unfairly treated as a result of the Department's failure to adequately inform them of a change to the time frame in which they could apply for compensation under the Program. There were 728 applicants identified as having claims rejected by the Department from April 1, 2003 to March 31, 2005. Of these applicants, 429 were considered eligible for reconsideration and were contacted by the Department to offer them the opportunity to re-submit claims for fuel purchases that had previously been disallowed during this period. Once contacted, 71 responses were received by the Department resulting in 31 applications for reconsideration. Total rebates paid by the Department were \$7,084.59. The Alberta Ombudsman is satisfied the Department has now fully met its responsibility to offer a fair reconsideration process, communicated that process to the applicants and allowed applicants an opportunity for reapplication. All recommendations put forward to the Department to enhance the quality and fairness of services provided have been accepted and implemented.

The Alberta Ombudsman is an officer of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and reports directly to the Legislative Assembly. The Alberta Ombudsman operates independently from any part of the Alberta government and individual elected officials. The authority for the Alberta Ombudsman to investigate complaints is found in the *Alberta Ombudsman Act*.

To access a copy of the "*Alberta Ombudsman's Investigation of the Remote Area Heating Allowance Program*" report, please visit our website at [www.ombudsman.ab.ca](http://www.ombudsman.ab.ca).

-30-

**Media enquiries may be directed to:**

Glen Resler, Director Corporate Services  
Alberta Ombudsman

Phone: (780) 427-2756

To call toll-free within Alberta dial 310-0000.