



ALBERTA OMBUDSMAN

## News release

July 17, 2006

### Alberta Ombudsman Investigates the Remote Area Heating Allowance Program

Edmonton... The Alberta Ombudsman, G. B. (Gord) Button announced today that he is investigating the process Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (the Department) is using to determine the payment to applicants who were unfairly denied rebates by the Remote Area Heating Allowance Program (the Program). The investigation is on his own motion pursuant to Section 12(2) of the *Ombudsman Act*. The Alberta Ombudsman recently completed an investigation which concluded a complainant was unfairly denied rebate compensation on propane purchases by the Program 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. In the course of the investigation, it was determined other applicants to the Program were similarly treated.

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.

The Alberta Ombudsman explained, “My investigation will focus 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.” When the investigation is completed, a public report will be released by the Alberta Ombudsman detailing any findings and recommendations he feels appropriate in relation to the process and to the overall administrative fairness of the Program for future applicants.

In response to the Alberta Ombudsman’s announcement, the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Hon. Doug Horner pledged the Department’s cooperation with the Alberta Ombudsman’s investigation. “We are working to identify those applicants who were unfairly treated by the process and we are working collaboratively with the Ombudsman to ensure that the application process is administered properly and in a fair manner.” Any applicants to the Program who feel they may have been unfairly denied a rebate because they did not apply within the one year time limitation are encouraged to contact the Department for further information. If an applicant is unsatisfied with the Department’s response, they may contact the Alberta Ombudsman.

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*.

For more information on the Alberta Ombudsman visit [www.ombudsman.ab.ca](http://www.ombudsman.ab.ca).

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