

By Bill Sendelback

Wildly Successful

Response to Massachusetts' wood/coal stove change-out program is overwhelming.

The state of Massachusetts has joined the efforts to get rid of old, dirty-burning wood and coal stoves and fireplace inserts with a unique voucher program that offers as much as \$2,000 to qualified homeowners to replace old models with EPA-certified wood stoves/inserts or pellet stoves/inserts. Organized and promoted by the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center (MassCEC), the Commonwealth Wood Stove Change-Out Pilot Program gave out almost \$1.2 million in vouchers since the program began on Dec. 27, 2012, resulting in 180 non-EPA wood stoves/inserts being changed out and destroyed as of May 1, 2013.

The voucher program was initially funded with \$140,000. However, there was so much consumer interest that it ran out of funds and stopped accepting voucher applications on Jan. 9, 2013, after receiving 800 voucher applications in only 12 days with 60 stoves being changed out during this effort.

The second program began on Jan. 18, 2013, funded by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) with \$303,000. But after only three days of taking voucher applications, that program, too, ran out of money, so the DEP committed to an additional \$500,000; on Jan. 25, 2013, state officials added another \$250,000 to meet the overwhelming demand.

Applications for vouchers for the second program were accepted through Jan. 27, 2013; there were 963 applications totaling more than \$1 million in vouchers. Through May 1, 2013, 120 stoves had been changed out for this second program with the deadline for voucher program with the deadline for voucher program with the deadline for voucher program extended to May 22, 2013.

“We are thrilled with this program,” said Ben Dodge, project manager for the Renewable Thermal Program of the MassCEC. “We have done projects for outdoor hydronics and pellet boilers, but the interest has always been there to get old stoves out of use.”

“This program has been wildly popular with taxpayers,” says Catherine Williams, the MassCEC’s communications director. “We’re more known for our efforts in wind and solar, but we’ve long been interested in biomass.

After research and study, we know this effort will improve our air quality.”

Security disability income or participating in the state’s Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program.

Voucher applications were submitted by participating hearth retailers and had to include an inspector-signed building permit, a picture of the non-EPA stove before removal and a picture of the qualified appliance after installation. Retailers were required to certify that the old stove had been rendered inoperable and disposed of at a scrap or junk yard.

“This has been a good program during a slow season for us,” said Bob Feen, owner of Feen’s Country Living, a hearth retailer in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, “and it resulted in additional business. We sold 11 new stoves as a result.”

“A great number of Massachusetts hearth products dealers were proponents of the program,” said Dodge. “We worked with the wood stove community, and they were great to work with, very positive. Dealers were helpful with ideas and suggestions for the program.”

The Massachusetts Clean Energy Center was created by the state’s Green Job Act of 2008. The center invests in early-stage clean energy companies and supports renewable energy projects while providing municipalities, homeowners and businesses with the tools needed to finance and locate renewable energy projects within the state.

The MassCEC, most known for funding solar and wind energy projects, receives funding from the Renewable Energy Trust Fund, created by the Massachusetts legislature as part of the deregulation of the state’s electric utility market. The trust is funded by a surcharge to electric ratepayers. The average residential ratepayer pays 30 cents a month into the trust.

The MassCEC also has a pellet boiler grant program now going on, offering as much as \$15,000 for residential and small commercial installations.

“We’d love to do another wood stove change-out program,” said Dodge. 🏠



Ben Dodge, project manager for the Renewable Thermal Program, MassCEC.

Vouchers for the average Massachusetts taxpayer were worth \$1,000 toward the purchase and installation costs of an EPA-certified wood stove/insert or pellet stove/insert. Low income taxpayer applicants received a \$2,000 voucher; low income consumers were defined as being on the state’s Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program or receiving Mass Health benefits or Social