

# Food Stamp rules go into effect this month to suit heat bills

There are new rules that will allow food stamp households to have the purchase price of their stamps reduced this winter if their heating, or other utility bills rise. This information comes from the Department of Health and Social Services.

The new rules, effective January 1, require state welfare

agencies to count a household's most recent utility bills in computing the household's food stamp purchase price. The new rules also direct states to recompute purchase prices within 10 days when a household's most recent bills represent an increase of more than \$25 over the bills used to certify the

household initially.

Here is how the new rules on increased utility bills will work:

-Participating households who have increased utility bills should contact their food stamp office. If the bills have increased more than \$25, and the household has not yet pur-

chased its stamps for the month, the adjustment in purchase price must be made within 10 days (or by the end of the month, if this comes first). If the household has already purchased its stamps for the month the adjustment should be made the following month.

-States will make the ad-

justment promptly on the basis of the most recently incurred bills, and will not delay the adjustments until after the household has managed to pay the utility bills.

-Households applying or reapplying for food stamps will be certified within 10 days if utility bills have gone up more than \$25.

-In states that allow households the choice of using standard tables or actual bills to compute a household's utility costs, households will be allowed to switch from a standard allowance to actual bills once during the household's food stamp certification period. This means that if a household was certified for stamps earlier this year using a standard table, and the household's actual bills this winter exceed the amount in the table, the household may switch to using its actual bills.

-States will not be allowed to average past utility bills in figuring a household's utility costs. Instead, they must use the most recently received utility bills, and other available information such as notices of utility rate increases.