

Q&As - RENEWABLE ENERGY BONUS AND SUPPORT FOR AFFECTED WORKERS

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS:

Energy Efficient Homes Package: **1800 808 571** (open 8am – 8pm weekdays and 8am – 4pm weekends)

Installer line (including transitional information for industry): **1800 029 686** (8am – 10pm weekdays)

Safety line (for all safety concerns including safety checks for foil installations): **131 792** (8am – 6pm daily)

Hotline for displaced workers: **132 850** (open 8:30am – 6pm weekdays)

Hotline for advice to employers who think they will have to lay off staff (Fair Work info line): **131 394** (open 8am – 6pm weekdays)

Hotline for companies who wish to speak to an Insulation Employment Co-ordinator to discuss the Insulation Workers Adjustment Fund: **13 33 97** (open 8am – 6 pm weekdays)

CEILING INSULATION:

When does closure of the Home Insulation Program come into effect?

- From close of business Friday 19 February.
- Installers have 7 days (up to midnight on the 26th of February) to lodge any outstanding claims for installations completed on or prior to the 19th of February.
- Claims lodged with an installation date after the 19th of February will not be accepted.
- More advice on this process is on the Environment Department's website and Medicare's website.

How will this deadline be enforced?

- Additional checks will be applied to every claim made from the time of the Minister's announcement to the deadline of 26th of February 2010.
- Installers will have to put claims in **manually with a copy of the work order form**, and the Government will be checking each and every one. The earlier Medicare claiming process is no longer operational.

When will the new insulation program begin?

- By 1 June this year, provided the Government is satisfied that arrangements and timelines for the scheme's implementation are sufficient to meet expectations of safety.

What about people who undertook training to meet the new requirements for 12 February?

- Compliance with these requirements will be considered in the design and implementation of a new registration scheme for installers ahead of June 1.

Why has the program been discontinued?

- This is part of a number of changes to the administration of environmental programs to boost safety and improve environmental performance.
- Safety for households and safety for the workers whose employment is funded by these important environmental programs is the Government's number one priority.

Why didn't you give people more notice?

- This was about ensuring household and installer safety, and an extended notice period would have led to work or claims being rushed, creating unacceptable safety risks.

What about the impact on insulation jobs?

- While safety is the absolute priority for households and installers, the Government understands this will have an impact on workers.
- Workers will have immediate access to assistance under the Government's Compact for Retrenched Workers, including access to retraining support and help in finding another job as quickly as possible.
- Any workers who have lost their job should call 132 850 for more information or contact their local Centrelink office or Job Services Australia provider.

What support is available to workers who have lost their job?

- The Government will offer any worker who loses their job:
 - Support to retain their current job until the new Renewable Energy Bonus program begins, or
 - Assistance to find alternative jobs or
 - A relevant training place where employment opportunities are not available to give them a better chance of finding a job in the future.
- The \$41.2 million Insulation Worker Adjustment package includes:
 - A \$10 million Insulation Workers Adjustment Fund to help workers and firms through the transition period. It will be allocated on the recommendation of a team of existing local employment coordinators and new dedicated Insulation

Employment Coordinators. The Fund will support firms to retain their workforces in work or training activities or to support workers directly.

- \$1.5 million for up to 25 dedicated Insulation Employment Coordinators, funded from the Jobs Fund. These new positions will assist displaced insulation workers to find alternative jobs with other employers and other industries. This assistance will complement and draw on existing support provided through local employment coordinators and the resources of the Job Services Australia network. The insulation employment coordinators will have access to the \$10m Insulation Workers Adjustment Fund to assist workers transitioning to alternative jobs or training.
- \$5 million for 1,000 Structural Adjustment Places to help retrain insulation workers in alternative industries announced today.
- \$24.7 million for 6,000 training places already announced to assist insulation workers - 2,000 each from the Apprenticeship Access places; the Language Literacy and Numeracy Program; and the Structural Adjustment Places.
- Job Services Australia providers will help retrenched workers identify local training opportunities through TAFE or other Registered Training Organisations based on a comprehensive individual skills assessment. The training under this package will be at no cost to the insulation worker.
- Any worker who loses their job will also have immediate access to assistance under the Government's Compact for Retrenched Workers. This means, when a retrenched insulation worker registers with a Job Services Australia provider, they will get immediate access to high level support – through Stream 2 or above.
- In addition when a displaced insulation worker registers with a Jobs Services Australia provider, they will get immediate access to high level support – through Stream 2 or above.
- This guarantees them access to retraining support and help in developing a tailored Employment Pathway Plan find another job as quickly as possible.
- This could include:
 - help to develop a resume and job applications, interview skills and presentation techniques;
 - advice on searching for a job, various career options and employment programs;
 - information about job vacancies and access to job search facilities offered by Centrelink and Job Services Australia providers, including JobSearch;
 - referral and placement into employment;
 - a comprehensive skills assessment;
 - skills development and training relevant to the needs of the local labour market and identified job opportunities;

- referral to education or training opportunities including the Productivity Places Program, the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program, or the Adult Migrant English Program;
- help to gain licenses, certificates or other qualifications; and
- work experience opportunities.

How long will it take to check potentially unsafe installations?

- The Government has said it is prepared to check as many houses as necessary which have insulation installed under the Home Insulation Program.
- The Government will expand its pro-active and targeted, risk-based audit and inspection program to 15 per cent of homes with non-foil insulation installed under Home Insulation Program which may have safety risks.
- The audit and inspection program will be overseen by the new Home Insulation Program Review Office and rolled out as quickly as possible.
- Over and above this risk based audit, a hotline has been established for households that are concerned about the safety of their insulation installed under the Home Insulation Program: 131 792.
- Through the hotline, households will be given advice in relation to their concerns. Arrangements for on-site inspections will be made in urgent cases.

Will the electrical safety checks for foil insulation you announced last week continue?

- Absolutely – the 49,000 householders with foil insulation installed will all get an electrical safety check.
- Householders and electricians can get more information from our website www.environment.gov.au/energyefficiency or call 131 792.

Will you keep taking and following up complaints?

- Yes. The complaints process doesn't stop with discontinuation, nor does compliance work.
- The Government will also establish a new Home Insulation Program Review Office to handle all complaints and enquiries and immediately address risks created by unscrupulous operators.
- The complaints process can be accessed through the Department of the Environment's website at: <http://environment.gov.au/about/contacts/index.html>
- The Government's compliance and audit processes will continue investigating claims of fraud, inappropriate installation and serious breaches of the program guidelines and action will be taken as appropriate.

Will the investigations into the deaths of the four installers continue?

- Yes. The Australian Government fully supports these investigations being undertaken by the relevant authorities.

What is the household Renewable Energy Bonus?

- The Government will establish a new household Renewable Energy Bonus Scheme to assist households save money on power bills and reduce their carbon emissions.
- This new Scheme will replace the Home Insulation Program and the Solar Hot Water Rebate Program both of which have been discontinued.
- Under the Renewable Energy Bonus scheme households will be able to receive a rebate for the installation of ceiling insulation or a solar hot water system or a heat pump.
- \$1000 rebates will be available for ceiling installation and solar hot water systems and \$600 rebates for heat pumps systems.
- The solar hot water component commenced on 20 February 2010.
- It is intended that the insulation component of the Renewable Energy Bonus scheme will come into operation by 1 June.

How is the Renewable Energy Bonus different from the Home Insulation Program?

- This scheme will institute several key changes to the delivery of ceiling insulation including:
 - Householders – rather than installers - will claim the \$1000 rebate directly through the Medicare system.
 - Introducing a new registration scheme requiring all installers to reregister, pay a cash bond, show evidence of meeting the training and skills requirements and provide certified quality assurance and occupational health and safety plans.
 - Introducing a strengthened compliance regime in concert with State and Territory occupational health and safety and fair trading authorities.
- The Government will also be commissioning an external assessment of the proposed implementation arrangements for the household Renewable Energy Bonus scheme and will continue to provide oversight to the scheme during its operation.
- This assessment will consider whether the arrangements and planned timelines proposed for the scheme's implementation are sufficient to meet the Government's expectations of safety.

SOLAR HOT WATER REBATE PROGRAM:

What if I already booked my solar or heat pump hot water system installation?

- Transitional arrangements have been put in place for people who paid for or ordered their hot water systems prior to 20 February 2010.
- Eligible solar or heat pump hot water systems purchased or installed prior 20 February 2010 may be eligible for a \$1,600 rebate for solar hot water or \$1,000 for heat pumps, if proof of purchase or installation prior 20 February 2010 is included with the application.
- Applicants who ordered or made partial payment for their solar or heat pump hot water systems but had not had their system installed prior to 20 February 2010, must include written evidence of their order with their rebate application. A receipt for a deposit or a copy of their supplier's order form is required. A quote is not sufficient evidence of an order.
- In all cases final decisions regarding rebate eligibility will be made by the Government.
- All applications received from 20 March onward, regardless of installed date, will receive \$1,000 for solar and \$600 for heat pumps.

Will the Renewable Energy Bonus for solar and heat pump hot water heaters be delivered through the Medicare system?

- The existing rebate arrangement through the Environment Department will continue without pause, until the rebate transitions to the Medicare system by 1 June 2010.

GREEN LOANS PROGRAM:

How many more assessments are you providing?

- An additional 600,000 assessments before the end of 2010, on top of the Government's original commitment to 360,000 assessments.
- The program will transition into the new Green Start Program from 1 January 2011, with further details of Green Start to be developed over coming months, including a focus on low-income households.

Why are you ending the loans component of the Program?

- The most significant demand has been for assessments, rather than for loans, so the Government has redesigned the program to provide 600,000 assessments more than our original commitment.
- Households have options to make simple low-or-no-cost changes to reduce their environmental impact, as well as accessing generous Government rebates under the Renewable Energy Bonus, and also investing their own money and enjoying savings over time from reduced energy bills.

Why are you limiting the program to 15,000 assessments a week?

- This is about ensuring we build sustainable career paths in the emerging home sustainability assessment industry.
- 15,000 assessments a week is a significant amount of work, given that since 1 July there have been an average of around 5,000 assessments undertaken per week.

Why are you limiting home assessments to 3 per day and 5 per week – do you expect people to live on five assessments a week? (approx. \$1,000 per week)

- This is about ensuring a fair distribution of work between contracted assessors and about the quality of that work, ensuring assessors are not rushing through assessments.

Why are you limiting the number of assessors under the program to 5,000 (when thousands more have paid for training, insurance and third-party certification)?

- From the outset of the Green Loans Program, the decision to undertake training and seek accreditation was been a commercial decision made by individual assessors.
- As part of the focus on quality, a nationally accredited course will be available later this year, to enhance the skills and capabilities of assessors, and this will form part of the requirements on assessors to undertake continuing professional development.
- The Government is not limiting the growth of this industry outside of this program, whether that is in other state or future Commonwealth programs or in the market generally.