Saving on Your Utility Bill – You Can Do It!  Are you looking for ways to reduce your monthly utility bills? Let this free energy-saving workshop show you how. The workshop will show homeowners where they can make changes in and around their homes to reduce their energy consumption. The low-cost or no-cost methods will be easy for any participant to do, save money, and be more comfortable during the upcoming cold weather. The workshop will be offered at 5:30 pm on Tuesday, January 15. The workshop is free but preregistration is required.

Parenting Matters: Parent Education Program. It’s not easy being a parent. In fact, parenting is probably the most challenging job most of us will ever have. Come to this 8-week, hands-on creative learning program for parents who want to make a difference in their child’s life and improve their parent-child relationship. You will learn how to manage stress, improve your communication skills, avoid power struggles with your child, and build a support system to help you. The classes will meet on Tuesdays-January 15 through March 4—from 12 noon to 2 pm. A $10 registration fee covers materials; preregistration is required. Call to inquire about evening classes.

New Weight Management Program: Eat Smart/Move More/Weigh Less. This new weight management program gives you practical skills to lose or maintain your weight in a healthy way. Even if we are able to maintain and not gain over the holidays, we may still want to plan for eating healthier and moving more in 2008. The class will meet on Mondays, 12:00-1:00 pm, January 28 through May 12. Plan to attend all sessions or as many you can. A $20 registration covers supplies, personal journal and magazine; preregistration is required.

Basic Home Maintenance Course – Have you wanted to make those basic home repairs but didn’t know where to start? The Buncombe County Cooperative Extension Center is offering a five-series Basic Home Maintenance Course beginning Tuesday, February 26 from 5:30-7:30 pm. Remaining dates for the course are: February 28, March 4, 6 & 11. Some of the topics to be covered are: saving on your heating and cooling bills, basic plumbing repairs, interior and exterior maintenance, landscaping and lawn care, indoor air quality, common household pests, etc. The course also offers "hands-on" activities that include repairing: leaking faucets, damaged drywall, and replacing window screens. The fee of $20 includes all materials. Space is limited; pre-registration is required.

MORE INFORMATION OR TO REGISTER FOR ANY OF THESE CLASSES, CALL 828-255-5522. ALL ARE HELD AT THE Buncombe County Center of North Carolina Cooperative Extension, 94 Coxe Avenue, Asheville.
Being Outdoors During a Winter Storm

Although we are all aware of what we should do when outside during a winter storm, it is easy to get caught up in activities and forget about our wellbeing. Next time you prepare to go outside during winter conditions keep the following advice in mind.

- **Avoid overexertion when shoveling snow.** Overexertion can bring on a heart attack—a major cause of death in the winter. If you must shovel snow, stretch before going outside.
- **Cover your mouth.** Protect your lungs from extremely cold air by covering your mouth when outdoors. Try not to speak unless absolutely necessary.
- **Keep dry.** Change wet clothing frequently to prevent a loss of body heat. Wet clothing will lose all of its insulating value and transmits heat rapidly.
- **Watch for signs of frostbite.** These include loss of feeling and white or pale appearance in extremities such as fingers, toes, ear lobes, and the tip of the nose. If symptoms are detected, get medical help immediately.
- **Watch for signs of hypothermia.** These include uncontrollable shivering, memory loss, disorientation, incoherence, slurred speech, drowsiness, and apparent exhaustion.
  - **If symptoms of hypothermia are detected:**
    - get the victim to a warm location
    - remove wet clothing
    - put the person in dry clothing and wrap their entire body in a blanket
    - warm the center of the body first
    - give warm, non-alcoholic or non-caffeinated beverages if the victim is conscious
    - get medical help as soon as possible.

Source: FEMA

Battling That Wintertime Loneliness

With the cold weather and shorter days comes times when we can feel lonely. Wintertime is the time of year when loneliness increases and many of us don’t know what to do when we start feeling alone and blue. Instead of giving in to those low feelings try some new ideas for staying involved with others this winter.

- **Brighten your life.** If you don't have problems with windows letting in cold air, open the shades and curtains and get plenty of sunlight. You can even buy special lamps that help people who are sensitive to the light deprivation during the winter.
- **Take an active part in the world around you by getting involved in your community associations, schools, churches, teach local children some craft or skill you have or even see if a local daycare needs a volunteer to come in and read to their children.
- **Be sure to get regular exercise.** On the days when it is nice outside take a walk. When it is bitter cold or wet, move your exercise inside with dancing, chair exercises or even cleaning house to your favorite music.
- **Dress to impress.** Make sure your favorite outfits are ready to wear. Many times we won’t dress up for ourselves but take the time this winter to dress up and even invite a friend over for a fancy tea or meal.
- **Plan things to do each day.** When we have things to do that we can check off, we tend to keep ourselves too busy to feel those lonely moments.
- **Eat well.** When we forget to eat a balanced diet, we miss out on needed nutrients that our bodies use to help improve our moods and have the energy to try new things.
- **Begin a new hobby.** This might be the time to take a new class or try your hand at a new craft. Brighten the day for someone else. This keeps you involved with others and benefits both you and them.
- **Don't be afraid to talk about the low feelings.** More than likely you are not alone in feeling those wintertime blues and when we talk our feelings out, we often find ways to deal with them and feel better afterwards.
January is National Radon Action Month

Has your home been tested for radon? Did you know the invisible, odorless, tasteless, naturally occurring gas can enter your home and cause lung cancer? The US Environmental Protection Agency has designated Buncombe County has a Zone 1 county. This means elevated levels of radon have been found in homes throughout the county. The only way to know if your home has elevated levels is to test. You can not rely on the radon results of a neighbor’s house or that of the house down the block. The levels found in the home are determined by the location of the source to the home and the construction methods used.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that radon is responsible for more than 20,000 lung cancer deaths per year. It is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the U.S. after smoking and the leading cause of lung cancer among non-smokers.

Testing homes for elevated levels of radon is simple and inexpensive. Once your home has been tested and if the results are below the action level of 4 pCi/L (picocuries per liter), you will not have to test again unless changes are made to the home. In our area we tend to have the more elevated levels during the winter months so January is a good time to test. Should your home be found to have elevated levels of radon the problem can be fixed by qualified contractors for a cost similar to that of many other home repairs. In our area the cost can be from $800 to $2500 depending on the home.

The Buncombe County Cooperative Extension urges residents to take action during this year’s National Radon Action Month by testing their homes for radon. For more information on radon, radon testing and mitigation, and radon resistant new construction, or to obtain a free radon test kit, contact the Buncombe County Extension Center.

Veggies and Fruits: The Other White Foods

Even with the cold months of winter upon us, we are able to have many vegetables and fruits on our table. Whether they are the fresh seasonal produce or the ones frozen or canned from the warmer months, the white, brown and tan vegetables and fruits bring many benefits to our health. Examples of what these fruits and vegetables contain are phytochemicals like allicins in the garlic and onion family, and the mineral, selenium which is found in mushrooms. White veggies and fruit are also a part of a low fat diet and can help in maintaining our heart health, cholesterol levels and even decrease the risk of some cancers. So, look to add, bananas, brown pears, dates, white nectarines and white peaches as your fruits and cauliflower, garlic, ginger, Jerusalem artichoke, jicama, kohlrabi, mushrooms, onions, parsnips, potatoes, shallots, turnips and white corn as your vegetables.

If It’s Safe to Eat, It’s Safe to Refreeze

With winter comes times when our electricity goes off. In the past we would rush to cook the meat that thawed as fast as we could. This is not the recommendation now. If the meat has stayed at 40°F or below, it is safe to refreeze or cook. It is also still safe to cook or refreeze if it still has ice crystals. If meat has stayed above 40°F for more than 2 hours or you do not know the temperature of the meat, it is not safe to cook and eat. Be cautious and remember “If in Doubt, Throw it Out”. For a full list of what you can save if the refrigerator or freezer has gone out, call our office.
Stove Top Cooking to Save Energy

Many of us use our stove top on a daily basis but pay little attention to the various settings and how reducing the temperature can reduce energy use. It is important to select the heat to fit the job. With gas burners you can see the decreasing amount of energy from High to Warm settings. A similar variation occurs in an electric surface unit. The full wattage (BTUs for gas) is used only for the high setting.

**High** – Use to start cooking foods with liquid and to boil water.

**Medium High** – Use for browning meats. If meat spatters, heat is too high; if meat does not “sizzle”, heat is too low.

**Medium** – Use to cook heat-sensitive foods such as bacon, eggs, pancakes, milk and cheese dishes. Use to maintain boiling of large quantities of foods.

**Low or Simmer** – Use to continue cooking average quantities of food after bringing to a boil on high. Foods cook equally fast if boiled slowly or rapidly.

**Warm** – Use to keep food at serving temperatures, to finish cooking small amounts of food, to cook soups and stews, and to melt butter and chocolate.

**Source:** University of Kentucky

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Individuals with disabilities who would like to participate in any program mentioned in this newsletter but who need special assistance to do so, should call the Extension Center at 828-255-5522 at least five days prior to the event.