

From the Hotline

The questions and answers below address recent changes associated with Standard Utility Allowances in the Food Stamp Program. These changes were effective April 1, 2003 and were issued as part of State Letter 1255.

Q. My food stamp recipient has verified that she pays a mortgage on a single family residence. Since she owns and lives in her own home, can I assume that she is eligible for the Heating/Cooling SUA as long as she confirms that she is paying her own heating bills?

A. Yes. If your recipient verifies that she owns a single family home, it may be assumed that she is responsible for her own heating bills. This SUA would also be appropriate for a recipient who provides you with a rental agreement verifying that her rental amount does not include heat. Therefore, the Heating/Cooling SUA would be appropriate.

Q. If I assume that the Heating/Cooling SUA is appropriate when my recipient either owns a single family home or pays a rental amount that does not include heat, how do I verify that I have used the appropriate SUA? Do I still need to request utility bills or a written statement from the recipient?

A. To verify that you are using the appropriate SUA, confirm with the recipient that she is paying her own heating bills and request a copy of the recipient's mortgage agreement or rental/lease agreement stating that utilities are not included. This is sufficient verification for using the Heating/Cooling SUA.

Q. Although the warmer months are approaching, I am still recertifying AUs using the Heating/Cooling SUA even though many of my recipients are not currently paying for any heating or cooling costs. If my recipient normally pays for heating costs during the fall, winter and spring months but has no expenses for heating or cooling during the summer, is he entitled to the Heating/Cooling SUA when his certification period ends this month?

A. Yes, SUAs are yearly amounts. Although your recipient is not currently paying any heating or cooling costs, it would be appropriate to use the Heating/Cooling SUA as long as heating is a regular, recurring expense during the year.

More information on the SUA is located in *A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*, Chapter XIV, pages I-4

through I-6 as well as in 106 CMR 364.400(G).

FYI

USDA Clarification Regarding the Use of Fans for Cooling Expenses

USDA has issued a clarification that FS AUs that do not incur heating costs separately from shelter costs are not entitled to the Heating/Cooling SUA if the only cooling expense is a fan. The *BEACON User's Guide* will be updated shortly to remove the reference to fans as an allowable cooling expense.

From the Forms File

New Form

*13-080-0403-05
EA-3 (4/2003)
Application for Housing
Assistance Services*

This form is completed when an applicant is requesting only HAP services to prevent homelessness. The form collects information for determining the applicant's financial eligibility for HAP services. Please refer to Field Operations Memo 2003-11 for more information on the use of this form. The Spanish version will soon be available.