

CAA gets additional \$6 million

Stimulus money will be used to weatherproof more homes

By Chris Gautz

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The federal stimulus bill promised to increase home weatherization efforts across the country, but it has failed to meet its goals thus far.

That is not the case locally.

The Community Action Agency which serves Jackson, Lenawee and Hillsdale counties, was originally given \$5.7 million in stimulus funds. The state asked the agency to have completed 266 homes by Aug. 1. As of two weeks ago, it had finished 614 and has spent more than half the allocation. The goal is to complete about 1,700 homes in the three-county area.

"We are one of the top three performers in the state," Community Action Agency CEO Marsha Kreucher said. "Things are really bustling."

Kreucher said Wednesday that because her agency has done so well, so fast, the state is giving it another \$6 million in performance-based stimulus funds so it can continue to weatherize homes.

"It will mean we will be able to keep at this until March 2012," she said.

That is the deadline the agency has to spend the money.

"This will mean steady work for contractors," she said.

About \$3.5 million has gone out to 17 general contractors, which employ a total of about 70 people, Kreucher said.

The money is used to make homes more energy efficient by improving insulation, repairing windows, weather-stripping leaky doors and more. It is estimated homeowners will eventually spend about 30 percent less on energy bills because of the work.

"I think we'll see this winter a big difference in utility bills," Kreucher said.

That means the homeowners will have more money to spend on other things in the community, she said.

In previous years, the CAA usually had enough cash to provide about \$2,000 in weatherization improvements for about 75 homes annually in Jackson County. This time around, it is spending an average of \$5,700 on each home project.

Beth Bingham, director of the state's Recovery office, said in an e-mail that as of Friday, 6,237 homes had been weatherized in Michigan. She said the state has spent \$33.5 million of its \$243 million allocation.