



---

## **Help available to stay warm this winter as four new areas become smoke free – Mary Coughlan Minister for Social and Family Affairs**

Social welfare recipients in four more new smoke free urban areas are to receive increased fuel allowances to help them buy smoke free fuel, Mary Coughlan, Minister for Social and Family Affairs, announced today.

The ban on bituminous coal and “petcoke” comes into effect on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October – and new social welfare fuel allowance payment rates will commence the same week.

”The extension of the smoke free ban to Sligo, Kilkenny, Bray and Tralee is a move to a cleaner environment and a healthier environment. However there is a cost for that, and people on social welfare payments who qualify for the fuel allowance will have their payments increased to meet the cost of more expensive smoke free fuel, “said Mary Coughlan, Minister for Social and Family Affairs.

”Increased fuel allowances are already paid in banned smoky coal areas including Dublin, Cork and ten other urban centres, and the extension of this payment will ease the cost of staying warm this winter.

”At present approximately 257,500 people receive a fuel allowance, and approximately 115,000 of those recipients will get an additional €3.90 smoke free top up in addition to their weekly €9 fuel allowance. The total



cost of providing a fuel subsidy will be approximately €82million a year, “added Minister Coughlan.

The increased payment will be made automatically to social welfare customers in the four new areas, however, if someone has any difficulty they should contact their local Social Welfare office immediately, said Minister Coughlan.

ENDS - September 22nd 2003

## **NOTE FOR NEWS EDITORS**

The National Fuel Scheme is intended to help households who are dependant on long-term social welfare or health board payments and who are unable to provide for their own heating needs. The scheme usually operates for 29 weeks from early October to mid-April. This year the scheme will run from September 29<sup>th</sup> 2003 to April 16<sup>th</sup> 2004.

The Fuel Allowance is currently €9.00 per week. An additional Smokeless Fuel Allowance of €3.90 per week is payable if you live in certain areas\* where the sale of bituminous fuel is banned.

Payment from the Department of Social and Family Affairs will be made by means of a book of payable orders or, for those in receipt of long-term Unemployment Assistance, the allowance will be paid each week in addition to the Unemployment Assistance.

Those in receipt of a payment from the Health Board will be paid directly by the relevant Health Board.

\* *Arklow, Cork, Drogheda, Dublin, Dundalk, Limerick, Wexford, Galway City, Waterford City, Celbridge, Naas and Leixlip.*

