

Heating misery 'kills 30 a week'

Unclaimed benefits top £100m

By **CHARLES WALKER**
Political editor

MORE than 30 people are likely to die every week in Notts this winter because they live in poorly heated homes.

On average 529 residents die between December and March in the city and county, according to the East Midlands Public Health Observatory.

But doctors and debt advisers fear the number could increase this year – as older people and those on low incomes switch off their heating to meet the cost of rocketing



energy bills. Deaths could be avoided if people claim benefits they are entitled to in order to pay heating bills.

An investigation by the *Post* has revealed that more than £100m goes unclaimed in Notts each year.

As part of the *Post*'s Stay Warm For Winter Campaign, experts are urging Notts residents to find out what they are entitled to.

Nottingham North MP Graham Allen added: "People are unnecessarily putting themselves at risk."

Full story: Pages 6&7

Outlook bleak in winter's icy chill

More than £100m in social security benefits goes unclaimed each year in Notts. Today, as part of the Evening Post's Stay Warm for Winter campaign we urge readers to find out what benefits they are entitled to. Political Editor **CHARLES WALKER** reports

Elpedo Roach is determined to give his children the protective warmth of a father's love.

"I'm not going to let my kids feel the cold," he said defiantly. But the truth is he is struggling to keep his house warm and water hot.

Mr Roach, who has two children aged 10 and 16, finds it a constant battle to put enough money in the meter.

He added: "I am not bothered about myself. It is for my children. I have to keep the kids warm but it is very difficult."

Sometimes it simply is not possible. On the coldest nights, he has left just one radiator on in the house in the front room and the three of them have slept there, cramped together.

Mr Roach, 64, moved to Nottingham from the Caribbean when he was 17.

He said: "Since I have been living in this country I have never been in this situation."

He can no longer work because he has severe arthritis and the family is dependent upon the £168 a week he claims in benefits. He pays for his electricity through a pre-payment meter and recently switched to a pre-pay meter for gas as well.

However, when he settled the previous account the meter had not been read for a long time and the energy firm told him he owed £415.

It came as a nasty surprise to Mr Roach and he is now paying it off. Each week he puts a minimum of £20 into the meters for gas and electricity.

"It will not last a week," he said. He is amazed at the current price of energy and finds it hard to understand how much it is costing him.

"I'm not running a chip shop," he said. "I am dreading the winter. I don't sleep, everything comes down in front of me."

Many people in Nottingham are suffering anxiety this winter because of their energy bills.

The energy regulator Ofgem says the cost of gas has increased



Top Ten Tips

- Check your benefit entitlements at the Nottingham Warm Zone, Citizens' Advice Bureau, your local advice agency or Job Centre. You may be entitled.
- Phone the Inland Revenue (0845 300 3900) to see all the tax credits to which you're entitled.
- Get help with your debts earlier rather than later. Contact an advice agency or phone the National Debtline (0808 8084000).
- Pay your priority debts first: rent, mortgage, council tax and utilities.
- If you are struggling with mortgage payments, talk to your lender about other options such as paying interest-only or getting a payment holiday.
- See if you can get your utility bills reduced (discounts may apply) - talk to your supplier or an advice agency. Consider applying for an energy grant (see www.direct.gov.uk).
- You may be entitled to a Council Tax discount if you are single and live alone.
- Consider contacting Nottingham Credit Union for low-costs loans.
- Check if you are entitled to free school meals/milk or school clothing grants by phoning the council on 915 4084.
- Contact Nottingham Warm Zone about grants to improve home insulation and heating.

48% in the past year and electricity has gone up 18%.

This week the Evening Post launched a campaign to help Notts folk find the help they are