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As Coloradans prepare for the Fourth of July holiday, Energy Outreach Colorado encourages taking extra precautions to stay safe and look out for neighbors as temperatures start to sizzle.

"Several days of hot summer temperatures are challenging for most of us, but they can be dangerous for seniors, families with children and people with special needs who may not have the resources to cool their home or the ability to escape the heat by going to an air-conditioned shopping mall or a swimming pool," said Skip Arnold, executive director for Energy Outreach, a statewide non-profit agency that raises money for low-income energy assistance and weatherization programs.

"We urge everyone to think about the folks in their neighborhoods and communities who may be isolated and suffering through summer heat spells, and make sure they are getting the help they need to stay healthy and comfortable," he added.

In particular, lower-income

households that need help paying their home energy bills can apply for assistance from Energy Outreach Colorado by calling toll-free 1-866-HEAT-HELP (1-866-432-8435) or going to www.EnergyOutreach.org.

For immediate relief, Energy Outreach Colorado offers these simple home cooling tips:

- Keep windows and window coverings shut during the day, then open them at night to let in cooling breezes.

- Avoid running fans in open windows when temperatures outside are hotter than inside; this actually increases the inside temperature.

- If you use a window air conditioner, make sure it is the correct size for the area, the filter is clean, and the fresh air vent is closed. If possible, install it in a north-facing window and keep out of direct sunlight.

- Dishwashers and washing machines generate heat when they're operating, so run them only in the evening once temperatures have cooled.

Turn off the heated drying option on your dishwasher and use cold water when doing laundry.

- Incandescent light bulbs release about 90 percent of the energy they use in the form of heat. Replace them with energy-efficient compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) to reduce heat and save money.

- Set your refrigerator thermostat to between 37 and 40 degrees and the freezer between 0 and 5 degrees. Even 10-degrees cooler can increase energy usage by as much as 25 percent.

Energy Outreach Colorado is the only statewide source for energy assistance during the summer months and distributes funding through a network of more than 100 assistance organizations including Salvation Army, Catholic Charities and Seniors, Inc. This year, Energy Outreach plans to distribute more than \$9 million in energy assistance funding through September 30.