

Community Action Directors of Oregon

**Oregon Low-Income Energy Assistance Snapshot 2007  
- Executive Summary -**

January 24, 2007

Community Action Directors of Oregon presents the *Oregon Low-Income Energy Assistance Snapshot 2007*, a report on the status of low-income energy assistance programs in Oregon during the week of January 8 - 12, 2007.

Low-income Oregonians suffer with historically high energy prices and increasingly unaffordable energy bills. As a consequence, these households are forced to make drastic lifestyle choices as they struggle to pay their bills.

- Funding for low-income bill payment assistance increased during 2006 – led primarily by the **one-time** Duke / El Paso settlement funds. These one-time only funds are nearly exhausted.
- Community Action agencies statewide are reporting that funding for bill payment assistance still **remains insufficient** to meet the needs of low-income Oregon households.
- Current funding will **only serve about 23 percent (less than 1 in 4)** of the total number of Oregon households that are qualified to receive bill payment assistance. Without additional funding this percentage will decline once the remaining Duke / El Paso funds are gone.
- Over **11,000 households are on waiting lists** for assistance. This number is significantly understated since many agencies do not keep waiting lists.
- Every day thousands of Oregonians contact their local agencies seeking energy assistance. A majority of these households either have a utility shutoff notice or are currently disconnected from utility service. **Most will receive no help.**
- Community Action Directors of Oregon will be sponsoring legislation in the 2007 Oregon Legislature that will increase the baseline funding for the Oregon Energy Assistance Program from \$10 to \$15 million per year and protect that funding on an ongoing basis by adjusting the per customer payments for inflation.

This report includes stories of low-income families, seniors and people with disabilities who desperately need help this winter along with stories from local agencies telling of their struggle to keep their communities whole in the face of this crushing, and increasing, need.

For a copy of the complete report please contact:

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Starting at 3:30 a.m. on December 1, 2006 people began standing outside the Community Action Agency serving Marion and Polk counties in Salem hoping to secure one of the limited energy assistance appointments.  
(Photo courtesy of Joan Cote)

## **Oregon Low-Income Energy Assistance Snapshot**

**January 24, 2007**

A look into the current status of low-income energy assistance programs at  
Community Action Agencies throughout Oregon

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### **Wasco, Hood River, and Sherman Counties**

At Mid-Columbia CAC all of our energy assistance funding including both LIEAP and OEAP has been committed to clients with existing appointments. All our OLGA and GAP funds have also been exhausted. Our utility funded programs are also out of money.

We have a total of 550 households on our waiting list as of today that we could help, but we have no funding to help them with. With the recent cold spells we've experienced we expect to see current heating bills on the rise and calls to our offices to increase dramatically.

During the week of January 8 – 12 there were 35 contacts seeking energy assistance from our offices. We also handled 11 households who had their power disconnected. Due to our efforts the power was restored to these households by the next day. This is becoming an increasing problem as clients who are disconnected - or at risk being disconnected - have to be seen within 48 hours. In one instance the power company was at the door ready to disconnect the household's power, while the client was on the phone working with an energy assistance intake worker to keep the power on. Fortunately the power was kept on. Clients with later appointments many times end up without help because of the priority given to those being disconnected. Further, as the word is getting around now that if you are being disconnected the agency has to help you within 48 hours. We believe this sends the wrong message to our clients.

We believe we will start to see more households in trouble with their heating bills now that the holiday season over and the cold weather is beginning to settle in.

### **Washington County**

At Community Action Organization (CAO) during the week of January 8 - 12 we received more than 1,800 calls for assistance at our offices in Hillsboro and King City. We assisted approximately 280 families with payments; 34 of those families, or 12%, had already had their electricity or gas shutoff. More than 40% of these households had 5 day disconnect notices.

To date, we have spent 50% of our LIEAP funds for the year, serving 1,240 households. We expect to have these funds expended before the end of February. Our OEAP allocation for this quarter will probably be spent out by that time, also. Since October we have served more than 2,500 households. Our scheduled appointments are booked through January, but each day additional people come to our agency that have no heat and need to be "fit in" and helped immediately as emergency situations.

After March 1 we expect that we will only have a small amount of LIEAP Crisis dollars, OLGA money to serve approximately 25 households per month and Oregon HEAT dollars to serve 100 households through the end of the grant. This could force us to turn away people seeking assistance, with virtually no other resources in the county available for them.

This year we are seeing more people with 5 day shutoff notices and more people with very large arrearages. It is not unusual to see bills higher than \$1000. We are also seeing more and more seniors who have not used their heat at all so far this year, until they receive our help. This creates serious health and safety issues, but their fixed incomes are providing less and less for them and seniors choose to turn off their heat and/or hot water in order to pay for other essentials such as rent and medication.

The economic situation in Washington County does not seem to be improving for the people we serve. We are seeing a new population of Somali immigrants who are barely surviving on minimum wage jobs. Because of increasing rent in the Portland area and loss of affordable housing, more and more people seem to be moving to Washington County and commuting to Portland to work at low paying jobs. The increase in gasoline has forced working people to have to make choices between the basic necessities of food, shelter, or medical needs.

Louise is an 83 year old woman living alone in Hillsboro. She called our weatherization program because her heat pump was no longer working. It turned out that her heat pump only heated a small portion of her house and that actually her primary heat source was natural gas. Because she could not afford her gas bills, she had chosen to keep her gas off since last summer, which also meant she had not had any hot water. Her gas bills had been averaging \$150 per month and her total income is \$750. We were able to help her with LIEAP regular and crisis payments so that she could get her gas restored, have hot water, and be warm.

Joseph is a 43 year old single father of 3 children who has throat cancer and no medical insurance. He has been struggling to pay his medical bills. His gas was shutoff and he had a past due electric bill of more than \$400. He has only been able to work sporadically at a local car wash for \$7 per hour. During cold weather there is very little work there at all. We helped him to get his natural gas service restored and his electric arrearage paid. We also referred him to FHIAP for possible health insurance.

Linda is a 55 year-old mother with one teenager in the house. She owes nearly \$4000 in old bills, some of which were her father's, who had passed away. She declared bankruptcy and is struggling with bills from her previous marriage. Linda has Multiple Sclerosis and is unable to work. She needed \$800 to prevent a shutoff, which we provided through OEAP.