

CAP funds available for help with utility bills

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Eligible local families in need of assistance with their energy bills can still tap into available funds through the Lower Columbia Community Action Program (CAP).

Roxana Shelton, CAP's energy assistance program coordinator, said in a press release that three programs still have available funds to assist struggling families.

The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program is a federal program which assists low-income households with their heating bills, not limited to electricity. So far, 1,681 households have received assistance, totaling \$570,149, with an average of benefit of \$337 per household.

Shelton says that there is still \$166,000 remaining in federal funds to give out and estimates the program can help another 352 households with that amount.

This program does not require that people be in an emergency situation (having a shut-off notice) as other programs do. People must be a Cowlitz or Wahkiakum resident, and their income must not exceed 125 percent of federal poverty guidelines. For example, a household of one cannot make more than \$1,128 per month; a family of two, \$1,518 per month; a family of three, \$1,907 per month.

In cooperation with Cowlitz PUD, CAP administers two programs for PUD customers. The Warm Neighbor Program assists people who have a shut-off notice. So far, 380 households have been helped, for a total of \$26,490, with an average benefit of \$70 per household.

Shelton says that there is approximately \$5,000 remaining in that fund and estimates that money can help another 71 households. Households cannot exceed 125 percent federal poverty guidelines.

The other program is Warm Neighbor Plus, using funds that came to Cowlitz PUD as a result of the Enron settlement. These funds are only for Cowlitz PUD customers who have received a shut-off notice, but the allowable income level is higher. A household of one cannot make more than \$1,805 per month; a family of two, \$2,428 per month; a family of three, \$3,052 per month.

So far, Shelton says that 53 households have been helped under this plan, for a total of \$11,086, with an average benefit of \$209. She estimates that, with \$82,000 in funds remaining, she will be able to assist another 392 households before Dec. 31, when the funds need to be spent.

"These are hard times on families, and we want them to know that there is help available," Shelton said.

For more information, call CAP at 425-3430, extension 231.