

# CAP energy assistance program cut in half

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Due to \$316,000 in federal funding cuts, this year the Lower Columbia Community Action Program can afford to help only half the number of clients who annually enroll in the agency's winter heating-bill assistance program, CAP officials said.

CAP administers the federally funded Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, which makes power bills more affordable to households consisting predominantly of senior citizens, homebound disabled people and Wahkiakum County residents, according to CAP.

Last winter, CAP helped 2,087 households with their heating bills. Officials estimate they'll be able to serve 1,050 households this year with the \$422,000 CAP has been allocated for the program this winter. Last year, the social service received \$738,000 for the program.

The cutbacks come when power bills will rise due to an 18 percent Cowlitz PUD rate hike that took effect Tuesday.

To qualify for energy assistance, a household's income must be at or below 125 percent of federal poverty level guidelines. After taxes, one eligible person could earn a maximum of \$1,134 a month, two people could earn \$1,532 and three people could earn \$1,930, according to CAP.

In the past, CAP would notify returning clients by mail, give them priority in signing up again for the assistance and process their applications by mail.

Now, people must come to CAP, 1526 Commerce Ave., Longview, to sign up for an appointment at 8:30 p.m. Nov. 15, which is Energy Assistance Sign Up Day. Appointments are set on a first-come, first-served basis and cannot be scheduled by phone.

If a senior or disabled person can't come to CAP that day, he or she may send someone else with their name, address, phone number and income source (for example, Social Security, Supplementary Security Income or TANF).

Wahkiakum residents may come to CAP on Nov. 15 or call for an appointment on Nov. 16. CAP will then hold these appointments in January, February and March at the Wahkiakum County Health & Human Services office in Cathlamet.

The Low Income Energy Assistance Program is different from the Cowlitz PUD's discount program, which CAP also coordinates for seniors and the disabled. The next enrollment period for the PUD's rate discount program is August 2012. That program serves 706 households, according to CAP.