

## **Media Advisory – Oct. 9, 2008**

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### **Winter energy assistance program up and running**

Snohomish County's energy assistance program is preparing to help nearly 8,000 low-income families and elderly needing help with this winter's energy bills.

The county expects to distribute as much as \$3.1 million in local, state and federal grant funds for energy assistance.

“In these tough economic times, we're going to find even more families needing help with energy bills,” said County Executive Aaron Reardon. “We're ready to serve them and make paying the winter heating bill one less worry.”

Already available is funding from the Puget Sound Energy HELP Program, which assists low-income PSE natural gas customers living in Snohomish County. The program began taking applications for assistance this week.

This past winter, the county distributed \$468,023 to 1,305 households through the program, the largest number since the program began in 2003 and a 41 percent increase over the number served in 2007. The average gas grant was \$359 per household.

This year, funding will start at \$417,683 with the potential for more to be made available as the season continues. Program guidelines allow household income up to 150 percent of the federal poverty level.

Federal assistance distributed through Snohomish County is expected to be available by Nov. 17. This past winter, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) provided nearly \$1.9 million in assistance to 4,589 low-income families living in Snohomish County.

Initial funding ran out, but Reardon and others petitioned for additional funding, which the Washington Congressional delegation eventually secured.

“What we had wasn't enough to help our hard-working families needing a quick lift,” said Ken Stark, the county's Human Services Department director. “Finding additional ways to help them is what government should be about.”

As a result, it's estimated by county officials that this year's funding could be nearly 50 percent higher at \$2.7 million. Final allocations to counties are expected in the next two to three weeks.

Assuming such an increase, more than 6,600 families will benefit this season from this federally funded program.

Average grants last year were \$408 per household and are expected to be the same this year. Program guidelines allow household income up to 125 percent of the federal poverty level.

Families needing assistance should call 425-388-3880 and set up an appointment.

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