



News Release

PSE's Energy-Assistance Fund Extends HELP To Low-Income Customers

BELLEVUE, Wash.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Nov. 10, 2003--Winter in the Pacific Northwest means lower temperatures and higher heating bills, but it doesn't have to mean greater financial hardship for low-income households served by Puget Sound Energy.

Eligible customers in PSE's 11-county service territory can receive up to \$750 annually in bill credits from the utility's HELP fund. The year-old assistance program provided bill relief to about 15,000 individuals and families during its first 12 months of operation.

"This fund helps people stay warm," said Darren Brady, PSE vice president of customer service, "but more than that, it helps stretch a family's budget for other necessities like food and rent."

The precise amount of HELP aid given to a PSE electricity or natural-gas customer depends on household size, income, and energy usage. The program is open to residential customers with household earnings up to 150 percent of the federal poverty standard. For a family of four, the income cap is \$2,300 per month. (In certain counties, the HELP earnings limit is slightly lower because of the counties' median income.)

A small fraction of PSE's basic rates for natural gas and electricity is dedicated to the HELP program. The average gas or electricity customer pays approximately 12 cents per month into the fund.

Besides PSE's HELP aid, home-heating assistance is available to eligible households under the federal Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). Both programs are administered by nonprofit community-services offices in each county PSE serves. HELP assistance is available to PSE customers year-round, while LIHEAP aid lasts only for the winter heating season.

Emergency, short-term bill assistance also is provided to PSE customers from the utility's Warm Home Fund. This fund, administered by the Salvation Army, consists of voluntary contributions from PSE employees, customers, and shareholders.

PSE customers can obtain the phone number and address of the nearest HELP-fund energy-assistance office by calling, toll-free, 1-866-223-5425.

PSE HELP Fund's Local Energy-Assistance Centers

Island County The Opportunity Council 360-679-6577 800-317-5427	Lewis County Community Action Council of Lewis, Mason, and Thurston Counties 360-736-1800
Jefferson County Olympic Community Action Programs 360-385-2571	Pierce County Pierce County Dept. of Community Services (for county residents) 866-223-1068
King County Multi-Service Center (for south King County) 253-874-4328 (Federal Way) or 800-422-1348 253-850-1338 (Kent)	Metropolitan Development Council (for Tacoma residents) 253-572-5557
Hopelink Energy Line (for north & east King County) 425-869-6027 800-348-7144	Skagit County Skagit Community Action Agency 360-428-1011
Central Area Motivation Program (for Seattle) 206-328-2356	Snohomish County Snohomish County Human Services Dep't. 425-388-7261
Kitsap County Kitsap Community Resources 360-479-1507	Thurston County Community Action Council of Lewis, Mason, and Thurston Counties 360-438-1100
Kittitas County Kittitas County Action Council 509-925-1448 (Ellensburg)	Whatcom County The Opportunity Council 360-255-2192

HELP Income Limits(1)

Number in Household	Monthly Income Limit
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1	\$1,123
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2	\$1,515
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3	\$1,908
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4	\$2,300
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5	\$2,693
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6	\$3,085
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7	\$3,478
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8	\$3,870
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9	\$4,263
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10	\$4,655
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(1) Income limits are effective 10/3/03-9/30/04. In most counties, household income can be up to 150 percent of the federal poverty level. The qualifying income is lower in Lewis, Jefferson, Kittitas, Whatcom, and Skagit counties.

CONTACT: Puget Sound Energy Roger Thompson, 888-831-7250

SOURCE: Puget Sound Energy