

Energy and Low-Income Consumers

Increasing energy costs play a substantial role in the financial pressures low-income people face. Energy costs for low-income families take a much bigger portion of the family budget than for non-low-income families. A typical American family spends more than \$1,600 a year on home utility bills. The average Wisconsin household pays 2.6% of its income on heating fuel, in contrast to households receiving fuel assistance. Families that receive fuel assistance are at 150% of poverty or less of the federal poverty guideline and pay an average of 10.6% of their total income for heating fuel.

Nationally, the average non-low-income family spends 7% of its income on all forms of energy, in contrast to the average low-income family which spends 25% of its income on all forms of energy. Low-income families in Wisconsin and throughout the nation are spending, as a percentage of income, over three times what the average non-low-income families spend on all forms of energy. Along with rising costs of housing, health care, education, and transportation, rising energy costs place an additional financial burden on families that have limited financial resources.

The 2005 National Energy Assistance Survey of 1,100 Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) recipients showed that:

- 73% reported they reduced expenses for household necessities because they did not have enough money to pay their energy bills.
- 19% kept their home at a temperature they felt was unsafe or unhealthy.
- 24% used their stove or oven to provide heat.
- 32% reported they did not fill their prescription or took less than their full dose of a prescribed medicine due to energy bills in the past five years. This included 41% of households with asthma, emphysema, heart disease, or stroke.

More Wisconsin families are being pushed into poverty, and the fastest growing segment of the poor is the working poor (40% of the growth in the past fifteen years), those who work at least forty (40) hours a week but are still unable to make enough to keep their families out of poverty.

Wisconsin's Home Energy Assistance Program (WHEAP) provides home heating assistance to eligible households. Income eligibility for WHEAP is at or below 150% of federal poverty level. For example, a monthly income for a family of four can not exceed \$2,418. Operating with federal funding, the program assists approximately 140,000 Wisconsin households annually. Heating Assistance is a one-time benefit per heating season. It is intended to help pay a portion of a household's heating costs, not the entire annual cost of heating a home. Electric Assistance is a one-time benefit payment per heating season to eligible households. It is intended to help pay a portion of the household's electric costs. A household may be eligible for Crisis Assistance if it has no heat, received a disconnect notice from its heating fuel dealer, if it is nearly out of heating fuel and does not have any way to pay for its heating needs, or if a heating emergency can be avoided. WHEAP crisis assistance provides both emergency and proactive services. Proactive services include training and information on how to reduce fuel costs, counseling on money management, providing payments to fuel supplies when a household agrees to a co-payment, and other actions to help avoid future emergencies.

Couleecap operates WHEAP in Crawford and Monroe Counties. Crawford County residents can contact Peg Gallagher at 608-326-0428; Monroe County residents can contact Sue Rahr at 608-269-1506. La Crosse County

residents call 608-785-6001; Vernon County residents call 608-637-5210. Households need to provide information on their income and heating costs. See the WHEAP Coordinator in your county for more details.

The Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program - *Federal Fiscal Year 2006 Year to Date Report* (updated 4/15/06) statistics show:

Service Area	% of Population Assisted by WHEAP	Median Annualized Household Income	Total Home Energy Assistance Payment Averages
Crawford County, Population 17,600	8.30% (2,120)	\$10,691	\$435
La Crosse County, Population 111,200	6.07% (18,319)	\$11,360	\$403
Monroe County, Population 43,600	6.60% (6,606)	\$10,837	\$469
Vernon County, Population 29,600	8.45% (3,503)	\$10,814	\$399
State of Wisconsin, Population 5,646,900	5.95% (949,059)	\$11,235	\$504

www.homeenergyplus.wi.gov/detailedreports

In addition to WHEAP, Couleecap operates a Weatherization program in our four county service area. This program can help reduce home heating bills, save energy, and make homes warmer in the winter and cooler in the summer. If a household is eligible for the county fuel assistance program, they may be eligible for the Weatherization program.

Services include:

- Insulate attics, walls, and floors
- Insulate or replace water heater
- Perform a general health and safety inspection
- Provide information about maintenance and energy conservation
- Reduce air leakage
- Install energy efficient lighting
- Repair or replace furnace
- Test and/or replace refrigerator

There are many ways to save on energy and money at home. These include:

- ✓ Setting your thermostat lower.
- ✓ Using compact fluorescent light bulbs.
- ✓ Air drying dishes and using the sun to dry clothes.
- ✓ Turning off your computer and monitor when not in use.
- ✓ Using power strips for home electronics so they can be all turned off at once.
- ✓ Lowering the thermostat on hot water heaters.
- ✓ Washing only full loads of dishes and clothes.
- ✓ Taking short showers instead of baths.
- ✓ Driving sensibly.
- ✓ Using ENERGY STAR® appliances and products.

Couleecap, Inc. is a private non-profit 501(c)3 charitable organization created in 1966. Our four-county service area includes Crawford, La Crosse, Monroe, and Vernon counties in Wisconsin. For more than 40 years, we have been helping low-income people build on their strengths and become more self-sufficient. We operate over 50 programs in the areas of housing, family and youth services, and emergency services. For more information regarding Couleecap, Inc. and its programs go to www.couleecap.org, or visit our State association at www.wiscap.org.

Presented by Kay Mueller, Planner, Couleecap, Inc. Westby, WI. 54667 June 2006

References: 2005 National Energy Assistance Survey Report, Key Findings; www.neada.org
 U.S. Department of Energy, Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy; www.eere.energy.gov
 Wisconsin Community Action Program Association (WISCAP), Energy Information; www.wiscap.org
 Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program (WHEAP); www.homeenergyplus.wi.gov

Special Thanks to Todd Mandel for his assistance in preparing the final draft of this paper.