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# Heat assistance expected to increase

## Routt County agencies anticipate larger numbers of requests

By ZACH FRIDELL  
FOR THE DAILY PRESS

The temperature is going down, the heaters are being fired up, and Routt County residents again face heating costs they may not be able to afford. Local energy assistance resource groups say they expect requests for assistance to increase this year as the economy and lowered state requirements lead to more residents being eligible for help.

Last winter, 300 households turned to the Routt County Department of Human Services for assistance with winter heating, receiving \$350 to \$900 during the season from the state's Low Income Energy Assistance Program to pay heating bills.

Paige Roberts, LEAP eligibility coordinator for the county human services department, said the state raised the maximum monthly income by about \$100 this year.

Roberts said she expects that increase to make a big difference in the number of accepted applicants.

"Last year, I remember people being off by a very small amount, and that automatically disqualifies them," she said.

Roberts said LEAP organizers predict the increase in maximum income, coupled with the poor economy, could produce as much as a 40 percent increase in recipients statewide. That could mean as many as 120 additional recipients this year in Routt County.

A family of four will qualify this year if its gross monthly household income is \$3,400 or less.

Recipients also must be United States citizens and residents of Colorado.

Locally, LIFT-UP of Routt County also provides energy assistance to residents through

grants, local fundraising efforts and state funding. There is about \$11,000 available to Routt County residents this winter.

LIFT-UP Executive Director David Freseman said that from January to October this year, LIFT-UP distributed \$32,294 to 204 eligible households. That is close to the amount distributed throughout 2008.

"Obviously, there will be an increase," he said. "We don't know how much right now, but there will be an increase."

Freseman said much of that money was donated through the Community Cares fund, the Salvation Army, Energy Outreach Colorado and federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds.

Applicants are required to apply for LEAP before applying for LIFT-UP assistance while LEAP is running from Nov. 1 to April 30.

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