

# Energy Share needs your help

With heating costs last year that seem to have gone through the ceiling, most people are waiting in dreaded anticipation for their first winter heating bill. Perhaps no one is more affected, however, than our low-income and working poor neighbors. The US Energy Information Administration predicts an increase in the cost of all major forms of home heating energy this year. Nationwide, the Natural Gas Supply Association (NGSA) anticipates a 10 percent increase in natural gas cost this heating season as well.

Energy Share of Montana is a statewide nonprofit organization that helps Montanans facing energy emergencies. Last winter, thanks to the generosity of individuals and businesses across Montana and with one-time extra funds from Northwestern Energy and the Montana Public Service Commission, Energy Share had enough funds to help 2,645 households - more than ever before. However, Energy Share's capacity to help Montanans in

need will not be nearly as great this winter due to the one-time nature of some of our funding last year.

According to the 2000 census, Montana has 90,000 households at or below 150 percent of poverty. "The need for Energy Share's services will continue to be at a historically high level," said Janice Weaver, representing Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association on the Energy Share Board. Gene Leuwer, Director of Rocky Mountain Development Council and program operator, echoed Weaver's thoughts. "We expect to receive a continuing high volume of calls for energy assistance this winter. At least for now, the situation isn't getting any better."

Another source of funding for families in need is Energy Share's Endowment. Donations can also be made to the endowment. There is a 20 percent Montana tax credit for corporate donations and a 40 percent tax credit for individual donations. Maximum credit allowed for both donations

annually is \$10,000.

This November, all Montanans will find Energy Share donation envelopes in their *Rural Montana* electric cooperative magazine. Last year \$181,000 was raised and 100 percent of these gifts went directly to families in need. Donations stay in local areas.

Energy Share concentrates on providing one-time assistance for the majority of recipients. Families who live from paycheck to paycheck face financial emergencies when unexpected expenses occur. Frequently, these recipients repay Energy Share after their emergency or need has ended. Those in need of energy assistance this winter can call 1-800-777-7589 for more information.

