

# NO ENERGY FOR SOME, 1997: The Tradition Persists

June 2001

The U.S Dept. Of Energy's Residential Energy Consumption Survey 1997 (RECS, Energy Information Administration, Washington, D.C., 1999) reported on data low-income consumers provided regarding shutoffs of their main fuel because of inability to pay.

In 1997, nearly 2.2 million low-income consumers, or nearly five percent of those surveyed, suffered loss of their main heat fuel because of inability to pay for their fuel or for repair of their heating equipment; of these, 75% went without heat for one or more periods in winter.

Nearly two-thirds of those with disconnections lived in the southern or Sunbelt states.

This figure exceeds that of the previous RECS in 1993, even though 1997 was milder than 1993, and fuel prices were lower.

## **INABILITY TO PAY FOR HEAT OR EQUIPMENT REPAIR in 1997 AND ELIGIBILITY FOR LIHEAP ASSSISTANCE**

<b>NO HEAT – UNABLE TO PAY UTILITY BILL (1.12 Million, of whom 925 thousand lost electricity) 94% Eligible</b>
<b>NO HEAT – UNABLE TO PAY REPAIRS (842 thousand) 85% Eligible</b>
<b>NO HEAT- UNABLE TO PAY FOR DELIVERED FUEL (413 thousand) 99% Eligible</b>
<b>TOTAL, All Groups: 2,179,300* up by 8% from 1993</b>

Most of the customers who went without heat relied on Electricity or natural gas for that heat; this means that customer service arrangements to pay arrearages owed, billing plans and LIHEAP assistance had all failed to provide protection from this winter hardship.

**MAIN HEATING FUELS OF THE LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS WITH 1997 HEAT INTERRUPTIONS**

Main Fuel	% Of HEAT INTERRUPTIONS
NATURAL GAS	37%
LPG	8%
FUEL OIL	6%
KEROSENE	7%
ELECTRICITY	38%
WOOD	5%

Use of auxiliary space heaters can be an indicator of failing equipment and often creates safety hazards. Nevertheless, a third of all U.S. households reported using such heat sources in 1997.

About a quarter of the LIHEAP- eligible population reported using auxiliary space heaters for auxiliary winter heat. Electric heaters were the most common sources, followed by wood burning stoves or fireplaces. Many used more than one type to keep warm.

**Eligible Households Using Auxiliary Heat Equipment**

Type of Auxiliary Heat	Percent Eligible HH
Electric	12%
Kerosene	3%
Wood	7%
Natural Gas	4%

### Main Heat from Marginal and Hazardous Sources.

An additional three percent of eligible households (about 90,000 families) reported that one of the four types of equipment generally considered auxiliary heating sources, a portable electric heater or kerosene heater, a fireplace, or even their cooking stove was their main source of heat. Nearly two-thirds of these were using a portable electric space heater; clearly, many of the others, or approximately twenty thousand households, who were using their ovens or stovetops were at extreme health and safety risk from carbon monoxide.