



Southwest Energy Efficiency Project

Saving Money and Reducing Pollution through Energy Conservation

PRESS RELEASE

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NEW MEXICO UTILITIES AND PUBLIC OFFICIALS CALLED ON TO EXPAND ENERGY EFFICIENCY PROGRAMS Efficiency Group Hires New Mexico Representative

(Santa Fe, NM) – With natural gas prices on the rise in New Mexico and elsewhere, consumers and businesses will be hit hard in the pocketbook this winter when their winter gas bills arrive. Natural gas price increases will also impact their electricity bills, as a growing fraction of New Mexico's electricity is produced by natural gas-fired power plants.

In light of this situation, The Southwest Energy Efficiency Project (SWEEP) today called on New Mexico state officials as well as gas and electric utilities to expand energy efficiency programs. Doing so would help consumers and businesses lower their energy use and thus take some of the "sting" out of rising energy prices. "New Mexico is lagging behind most other states with respect to energy efficiency efforts," said Howard Geller, SWEEP's Executive Director. "With gas prices rising, efficiency programs in New Mexico should be greatly expanded."

Most households and businesses can reduce their natural gas and electricity use by 20 percent or more by adopting practical, cost-effective efficiency measures. These measures include higher efficiency furnaces, water heaters, and air conditioners; more efficient appliances and lighting devices; better building insulation; better windows; and improved building control systems.

SWEEP urges all utilities in New Mexico to help their customers identify and adopt these measures through programs involving education, technical assistance, and financial incentives. "Utilities operate comprehensive energy conservation programs along these lines in at least 20 states, but not in New Mexico," added Geller. "This situation should change. In addition, we urge Gov. Richardson to provide leadership for expanding energy efficiency programs in the state, complementing his firm commitment to renewable energy."

SWEEP, which develops and advocates for energy efficiency policies and programs throughout the Southwest, recently hired a New Mexico Representative to assist in these efforts. Jill Cliburn, a Santa Fe resident, has experience developing and running utility energy efficiency and sustainable development programs. Recently, she has written for and edited a number of national utility and energy trade publications.

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“Based on experience in other states, gas and electric utilities in New Mexico should be spending much more money on energy efficiency programs. In addition to lowering energy bills, these programs can defer expensive investments in power supply facilities, improve economic competitiveness and increase employment, reduce transmission system congestion and the risk of power outages, cut water consumption, and reduce pollutant emissions. The time has come to take advantage of this win-win opportunity for consumers, businesses, utilities, and the environment,” Cliburn stated.

In addition to expanded utility energy efficiency programs, SWEEP recommends that New Mexico upgrade its building energy code to state-of-the-art levels, and also promote the construction of highly energy- and resource-efficient “Green buildings.” It is especially important to make new homes and commercial buildings efficient because they will remain in use for 50 to 100 years, if not longer.

SWEEP also notes that a recent Policy Resolution sponsored by Gov. Richardson and adopted by the Western Governors’ Association (WGA) asks utilities and state agencies to “promptly develop energy efficiency measures that provide savings through technical assistance, financial incentives, accelerated penetration of new technologies, and appropriate regulation.” The Resolution also asks legislatures to take steps necessary to fund such efforts.

“Gov. Richardson understands the importance of improving efficiency and reducing energy waste. We hope he will take steps to ensure that New Mexico complies with the policies recently adopted by the WGA. This would benefit New Mexico’s citizens and businesses, and would set a positive example for other western states,” Cliburn added.

About SWEEP: The Southwest Energy Efficiency Project (SWEEP) is a public interest organization dedicated to advancing energy in Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming. For more information, visit the SWEEP website at www.swenergy.org.