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46TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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INFORMATIONAL COLUMN

THE HIGH COST OF HEATING YOUR HOME

MADISON - The average natural gas prices for December 2005 are almost 20 percent higher for residents compared to prices recorded only one year ago. Although such a dramatic increase in heating costs is alarming, there are easy steps you can take to save money while keeping your home warm for the remainder of the winter season. There are also cost assistance programs for families who are in need of the most help.

According to We-Energies, increased demand, decreased supply and the effects of natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina have all contributed to the increase in natural gas prices. However, there are ways to conserve energy in your home and keep heating costs low. When you use less gas, you save more money.

Some of the simplest measures you can take to conserve energy are cooking with small appliances, running the dishwasher only when it is full, lowering the thermostat while you are sleeping or away from home and replacing air filters each month. These techniques will help you winterize your home and could save you hundreds each year in heating.

Energy cost assistance programs have been available in the past, but with such a rise in energy costs there is an expected increase in the number of families needing financial assistance with heating bills. The Governor has announced the state would increase this assistance by as much as \$16 million, which will come as a relief to families that are forced to choose between paying for utilities and paying for other necessities.

In our area, you can call or write the MG&E Dane County office for information or to apply for energy assistance. The office is located at 1225 S. Park St. in Madison and the phone number is (608) 267-8601. You can also learn more about energy assistance online at www.mge.com/home/services/energy_assist.htm.

Families may also be eligible for cash rebates through WeEnergies on Energy Star appliances they may already have in their homes or are willing to purchase. These energy efficient products can save families about a third on their energy bill.

Personalized reports that track your family's energy usage are also available. More information on these items can be requested online at <http://www.we-energies.com/residential/ecosts/ecosts.htm>, or by calling 1-800-242-9137.

Although the reasons for such high energy costs are out of our hands, what we can control is our energy efficiency. The more measures we take to prepare our home and conserve energy this winter, the lower we can expect our heating bills to be.

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