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Energy-efficiency report targets under-served communities on island

KAMUELA, Hawai‘i—SJune 27, 2011—Recommendations on improving energy efficiency incentive programs for low-income households on Hawai‘i Island are available in a report now posted online. The report, “Energy Efficiency Strategies for Low-Income Communities on Hawai‘i Island,” by the Center for Industrial Ecology at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies was commissioned by the County of Hawai‘i and sponsored by The Kohala Center. It is posted at <http://www.kohalacenter.org/research.html>.

The report also examines 2009 Hawaii Energy expenditures for Hawai‘i Island energy efficiency programs. Hawaii Energy, the principal organization in the state that addresses energy efficiency, currently contracts with the Hawai‘i Public Utilities Commission (PUC) to coordinate energy efficiency programs and to oversee the Public Benefit Fund. In 2009, the first year of its state contract, Hawaii Energy collected \$3,026,861 in Public Benefit Fund fees from customers on Hawai‘i Island, but it only returned \$950,321 to the island for energy efficiency programs. Data that is more current was not available at the time of the study.

U.S. Department of Energy data shows that Hawai‘i has the highest electricity rates in the country. According to the new report, Hawai‘i Island households spend roughly six percent of their income on electricity, which is nearly three times the national average of two percent. Energy prices on Hawai‘i Island are an even greater burden for our low-income households, who may spend more than 15 percent of their income on electricity. Therefore, the report emphasizes how important it is that our most vulnerable families are able to take advantage of the fees paid to Hawaii Energy and that Hawai‘i Island re-capture the amount its rate payers contribute to Public Benefit Fund as part of their monthly electric bills.

"We have a responsibility to look out for our entire Island community and especially those sectors who are under-served," said Will Rolston, the County of Hawai‘i’s Energy Coordinator. "Therefore, we will continue to pursue and remedy any inequity in energy efficiency money that should be deployed on our island. It is self-evident that as we lift under-served community members, it strengthens the entire Island."

The Kohala Center is partnering with the County to educate island residents about residential energy efficiency as part of the pathway to greater island energy self-reliance; and Hawaii

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Energy is currently hiring additional staff to increase their educational programs and outreach to the neighbor islands.

The Kohala Center is an independent, not-for-profit center for research and education *about* and *for* environment. The Kohala Center builds teaching and research programs for energy and food self-reliance, as well as ecosystem health, to enhance island environments, serve island communities, and advance the work of the academy. See <http://www.kohalacenter.org>.