

## Women's Energy Matters

P.O. Box 637 • Rio Linda CA 95673 • 916-925-7058 or 510-915-6215 • bgwem@igc.org

### **MEDIA RELEASE 2/3/03**

Contact: Barbara George, Executive Director, Women's Energy Matters 916-925-7058

#### FIRST-EVER CONFERENCE OF INDEPENDENT, NON-UTILITY CONSERVATION PROVIDERS THIS WEEK IN SAN FRANCISCO

Feb. 4-5, 9am-3pm, Calif. Public Utilities Commission Auditorium, 505 Van Ness Ave.

Dozens of new, non-utility energy efficiency providers will gather for a conference this week at the Calif. Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) in San Francisco. They will give progress reports on a large variety of projects including insulation and appliances for multi-family housing, "Green Schools," energy-saving lighting and other equipment for small businesses, food service and groceries.

Participants include cities, colleges, State and local agencies, non-profits and consulting firms chosen in the CPUC's first-ever competition for independent, non-utility conservation programs. The experimental program is designed to compare the work of independent EE providers vs. utility operators of these programs.

Commissioner Loretta Lynch responded to reports of long-standing problems with utility conservation programs by setting aside 20% of energy efficiency funds for independent programs in 2002-3. All EE funds are collected from ratepayers in the "Public Goods Charge;" In the past, approximately \$280 million/year was shared exclusively by the big four utilities. Now, \$50 million/year of that is divided among these independent programs, while utilities still get the rest.

Public interest groups, including Women's Energy Matters (WEM) and The Utility Reform Network (TURN), have documented how utilities have undermined conservation programs over the years because they have a fundamental conflict of interest: energy efficiency "unsells" their main product. For years, the CPUC tried to offset this conflict with various rate mechanisms and "shareholders incentives" (i.e. extra profit for the utilities — which devoured 25% of the funds). Finally, in 2001, the Commission decided to give some independent entities a chance to show what they can do. Four other States have also opened conservation programs to non-utility providers.

Utilities delayed the start of independent programs for many months in 2002, and are continuing to intimidate and interfere with them. Barbara George, Exec. Director of WEM commented, "Utilities are very possessive about energy efficiency. At a time when Californians are angry about high rates and deteriorating service since deregulation, these programs still make utilities look good to the public. People are grateful for utilities 'giving' them a rebate check or helping them retrofit their homes and businesses. They don't realize it's all ratepayer money. They don't realize the utilities fight against the CPUC making them do good programs. But we believe this conference will begin to reveal that the independents can do a better job, in spite of all the utility harassment."