

No answer at state energy hotline

The Michigan Energy Administration's toll-free telephone hotline service ended in October, yet more than 100 callers each week continue dialing the defunct number. A senior Energy Administration official aired his disappointment over the termination of the 7½ year-old program.

"People need to feel they are taking the right action," said Tom Stanton, director of the Energy Clearinghouse department. "Many times we were confirming what a homeowner planned to do in energy conservation. We could help them understand what was cost effective."

CITING FEDERAL energy budget cuts as reason for the service shutdown, Stanton remarked, "there was no more fat to be cut. Our budget was down to \$300,000 per year, and we were facing another \$100,000 in cuts. 'The need is still out there,' he said. 'Given the resources, we would have



our land
Penny Wright

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Originally one of 10 state pilot programs to win federal funding, the Michigan Energy Hotline began operation in April 1978.

The program provided information and assistance to callers on such topics as energy conservation methods, use of renewable energy resources, new technologies and financial assistance programs. Homeowners comprised the majority of inquiries.

BY 1979-80 federal funds ended the toll-free energy information

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program to all 50 states. According to its designers, Michigan's version of the hotline assistance program was a model for other states.

"We've been copied by other states," said Stanton, who noted the department's handling of some 180,000 public contacts over the lifetime of the program entailed the distribution of 35,000 information pieces per year. How successful was the Hotline in

terms of saving energy? Cost-benefit analysis of the program showed Hotline users gaining \$12 of energy savings for every \$1 spent by the government.

ANTON admitted that in the later years of the program, the role of the information service had changed in many callers' minds.

"When we first started the person calling wanted information about solar or conservation devices before talking to contractors," said Stanton.

"Later, callers wanted us to be like 'Consumer Reports,' and they wanted a confirmation of the company or product."

He added, "We never felt our role to be a 'Consumer Reports.' Rather we wanted to explain to callers what to consider when shopping for energy saving alternatives."

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(O&E)

Training program for blind set

The Michigan Commission for the Blind will offer a training program for certified blind persons during the week of Jan. 6.

The workshop, also sponsored by the Easter Seal Society of Oakland County, will focus on independent living skills.

The program will be in the Easter Seal Society office in Oakland County. Transportation, meals and other lodging will be provided.

For registration or information, call: Michigan Commission for Blind (in Flint) at 233-3520 or Easter Seals at 338-9626.

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