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## Energy price hikes threaten fuel poverty targets, warn campaigners

energywatch, the National Energy Action (NEA) and the National Right to Fuel Campaign (NRFC), warned today that recent dramatic double-digit hikes in fuel prices threaten to blow the Government's targets on reducing fuel poverty off course.

While the Government's annual report on fuel poverty published today shows that fuel poverty dropped in the UK from 2.25 million in 2002 to 2 million in 2003, these figures do not show the impact of steep fuel price rises on the fuel poor since 2003, say the organisations.

energywatch, the NEA and the NRFC say the 21% rise in gas prices and 18% rise in electricity prices in the past 18 months have reversed the progress. Citing a new, independent report also out today, the organisations say that by 2009, there will still be between 1 and 2 million households in fuel poverty in England alone.

The report, *The Fall and Rise of Fuel Prices and Fuel Poverty*, shows that the Government will fail to meet its statutory obligation to eradicate fuel poverty among vulnerable households by 2010 if energy prices continue to rise while incomes remain comparatively static.

Allan Asher, Chief Executive of energywatch, said: "The fall in numbers demonstrates that the Government was making substantial progress in tackling this blight on society. Unfortunately, much of that good work has been undone by the price rises. It is inevitable that next year's figures will reveal a much bleaker picture."

William Gillis, National Energy Action Chief Executive, said: "We have repeatedly warned the government that fuel poverty targets are likely to be missed without greater investment in energy efficiency and this report confirms our fears."

Michael King, Chair of the National Right to Fuel Campaign, said: "The government needs to rapidly adjust its policies in this area and work to raise household incomes and increase investment in energy efficiency."