



Energy Advice - A Good Investment



Energy
Efficiency
Partnership
for Homes

DOMESTIC ENERGY ADVICE – THE FACTS

The Energy Advice Providers Group (EAPG) of the Energy Efficiency Partnership for Homes brings together representatives from energy advice centres, energy suppliers, local authorities and other significant providers of domestic energy efficiency advice.

Its mission is to improve the effectiveness and scope of advice to consumers on domestic energy efficiency.

The EAPG defines domestic energy advice as that which is *specific to individuals and their circumstances and aims to improve energy efficiency and achieve affordable warmth*. It does not include leaflets and other general information.

A number of studies over the past few years have explored the effects of giving advice to domestic consumers. In autumn of 2001 the EAPG commissioned the first study to evaluate domestic energy advice across all delivery mechanisms and all significant advice providers. The research aimed to:

- evaluate the overall impact of advice and the relative effectiveness of different methods of delivering advice;
- determine what actions result from giving advice and identify the benefits of following that advice.

The study was completed in February 2002.

The results clearly demonstrate that advice works. Significant evidence of what works best and what benefits consumers enjoy has also emerged from the study. Crucially, the findings and recommendations indicate ways in which advice provision can be improved.

Consumers are receiving advice in a number of ways:

- written advice tailored to their needs e.g. via a computerised survey;
- verbal advice – on the phone;
- verbal advice – face to face at an event or in an advice centre;
- verbal advice in their own home;
- a combination of written and verbal advice.

At the same time advice can be either *consumer-led* or *opportunistic*. It can be given to people who have specifically requested it or it can be given opportunistically e.g. when moving home, querying a fuel bill, having a new heating system fitted or when grant-aided energy efficiency measures are being installed.

Advice works

Advice is getting through to consumers:

85% of consumers can remember getting that advice and can recall what topics it covered.

They are also taking action. They are installing measures in their homes as a result of advice:

70% of consumers who receive any advice on measures do install some of the recommended measures within 9 to 15 months, sometimes with the aid of grants.

They are changing their habits in relation to cooking and refrigeration. They are controlling and adjusting their heating and hot water:

75% of all behavioural advice is followed in some way.





We know what works best

The study confirmed that two methods of delivering advice achieved consistently good results.

In the past there has been a perception that *verbal advice in the home* is an effective way of giving advice although it is the most costly method of advice delivery. The results certainly bear this out but also confirm that a combination of verbal and written advice works equally well. Both of these delivery methods result in more consumers taking action, either on their own or grant-assisted, to install energy efficiency measures.

In addition, both methods perform well at encouraging consumers to change their behaviour in order to save energy. *Advice in the home* performs a little better than the *written and verbal* combination. The cost of different delivery mechanisms needs to be viewed against their relative effectiveness, but there does appear to be a strong case for reinforcing customer-specific written advice with verbal advice and vice-versa.

Is it worth giving opportunistic advice?

Over half of the consumers interviewed in the study had not asked for energy advice but had received it *opportunistically*. They might be in the process of moving home, querying a high fuel bill or having a heating system installed. Even though consumer-led advice performed better, the results for opportunistic advice are still positive:

63% of those who were advised to install measures did follow that advice;

63% of those who were advised to make changes in behaviour did follow that advice.

The benefits are significant

Consumers who followed advice report a range of benefits:

63% have benefited from warmer and more comfortable homes;

Of all the consumers who had previously experienced draughts, damp or condensation, over 63% have noticed some other improvement: fewer draughts or cold spots, less condensation and a reduction in dampness and mould;

34% report lower fuel bills;

This rises to 47% among those who received written reports and verbal advice;

23% report an improvement in health.

There are lessons to be learned

A number of conclusions and recommendations emerged from the research report. These have implications for all who fund or deliver energy advice. There are key issues to be addressed by governments, local authorities, fuel suppliers, advice providers and consumer bodies:

- the benefits of providing a combination of written and verbal advice needs to be encouraged e.g. the effectiveness of self-completion energy audits can be improved and reinforced by telephone or personal contact;
- the cost of this dual approach needs to be weighed against the potential benefits;
- access to grants is lowest among those who receive only written reports and consideration needs to be given to those with reading difficulties;
- consumers are more likely to follow advice on behavioural changes when given in the home. It is important that this service is available to those most in need;
- some consumers who receive written energy advice do not recognise it as such. Action to improve the visibility and value of this advice can improve its effectiveness.

Continuing to improve the quality of advice

The EAPG is committed to improving the quality and range of advice. Its first priority is to work with all stakeholders to develop minimum standards and a Code of Practice for energy advice providers. This process will draw on the findings from this study and, when implemented, will provide a benchmark for effective energy advice. In particular it will address:

- quality of advice and information;
- customer access;
- staff training and development;
- service improvement and quality assurance.



FURTHER INFORMATION

You can access further information about this research:

From the Energy Efficiency Partnership for Homes website www.est.org.uk/partnership

you can download:

- a full report on this research in Word format;
- an executive summary of the report in Word format;
- a copy of this leaflet in black and white pdf format.

From the Energy Efficiency Partnership for Homes team
Email: partnership@est.co.uk

you can obtain:

- a printed copy of the full report;
- further details about the work of the Energy Advice Providers Group.