

PROTECTING CONSUMERS AND PROMOTING RENEWABLES

Welcome to the Autumn Newsletter

Dear RECC Member,

Welcome to the Autumn edition of the Newsletter!

As the evenings draw in and temperatures drop, you will find items in this edition on increased heat pump grants and Government's decision to delay the ban on homeowners installing new gas boilers. In contrast you will see that, in its latest Annual Report, the Climate Change Committee urges Government to take 'swift and decisive' action to curb carbon emissions.

You will also see that MCS has published the results of its recent consultation and is now starting to implement some of its decisions. It was a pleasure to see many of you at the Solar & Storage Live show recently.

I send you all best wishes for the next few months and the run up to Christmas.

Virginia Graham, (Editor).



Boiler Upgrade Scheme grants increased

Higher grants for homeowners installing heat pumps became available from 23 October.

In September, Government announced its intention to increase the grant level available through the Business Upgrade Scheme (BUS) from £5,000 to £7,500 to offset more of the cost of buying and installing air and ground source heat pumps.

RECC welcomes the increase in the grant level available. However, RECC considers the grant level for biomass boilers, which can be installed in off-grid properties where heat pumps are not suitable, should also have been increased from £5,000 to £7,500 as part of the package.

RECC considers that Government should have introduced stricter conditions, backed by financial assistance, for homeowners planning to install heat pumps. This would make it obligatory for homeowners to install solid wall insulation as well as cavity wall and loft insulation if recommended on the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC). Adequate insulation ensures that heat pumps work as efficiently as possible.

Virginia Graham, RECC Chief Executive, said:

"If Government is serious about making the change from gas boilers to heat pumps it is essential that they make it as easy as possible for homeowners... and ensure that properties are also fully insulated".

She went on to stress the importance of high consumer protection standards in this sector and said:

"Only by ensuring that installers are members of an approved Consumer Code will this protection for homeowners be effective".



You can find guidance on the BUS on the RECC website here: www.recc.org.uk/boiler-upgrade-scheme

And you can find more information on the Government announcement here: www.gov.uk/government/publications/boiler-upgrade-scheme-changes-to-grant-levels/changes-to-the-boiler-upgrade-scheme-october-2023

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RECC team members attend Solar & Storage Live show

Once again this year RECC team members were present in force on our stand at the Solar & Storage Live show. They spoke to many old and new friends, and existing as well as prospective members. Held over three days from 17 to 19 October, the show attracted a record number of visitors and exhibitors.

RECC Chief Executive, Virginia Graham, took part in a panel session on 17 October outlining the importance of high consumer protection standards in the small-scale renewable sector. She spoke alongside Faisal Hussain from HIES, Phil Mason from TrustMark and Marie-Louise Arbretti from Solar Together. The session was chaired by Molly Lempriere from Carbon Brief.

Virginia explained that RECC goes out of its way to assist members to comply with the Code and with the law. By providing model contracts, cancellation notices, performance estimates, quotations and workmanship warranties RECC members can be certain that they are treating consumers fairly and complying with the law. She explained that RECC also provides consumer protection training which is interactive and free to access.

At the end of the session, all four speakers agreed that it was very important to work together going forward to ensure that consumer protection standards do not fall in the face of a high number of new businesses seeking to enter the sector.



RECC publishes new guidance on consumers in vulnerable circumstances

RECC has published updated guidance for members outlining how they should deal with consumers who may be in vulnerable circumstances or have additional needs. The guidance has been produced after consultation with consumer protection experts within and beyond the sector, Code members and the West of England Centre for Inclusive Living.

Its key objectives are to ensure that all vulnerable consumers are treated fairly and that the products and services provided to them are accessible and tailored to their needs.

The guidance describes the types of vulnerable circumstances which members may come across including bereavement, ill health due to major surgery, visual impairment, deafness, illiteracy or various mental health conditions. It stresses that these circumstances may be temporary or permanent and that they are not always obvious.

Code members have an obligation to identify whether a consumer is in vulnerable circumstances or has additional needs and the guidance gives detailed advice on how to do this. It also recommends arranging their visit at a time when a trusted friend or relative can be present in the consumer's home and gives members advice about dealing with anyone who has power of attorney to assist the consumer.

The guidance sets out the measures that members should take to support consumers in vulnerable circumstances and stresses the importance of clear communication in a format that suits each consumer. It also underlines the need for appropriate training for all employees.

The guidance is available in the Members' area of the RECC website and to download here:

<https://www.recc.org.uk/news/recc-publishes-guidance-for-members-on-consumers-in-vulnerable-circumstances>



Government delays ban on new gas boilers by 10 years

Government has announced that it will not introduce its ban on homeowners installing new gas boilers until 2035, 10 years later than had previously been announced. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak says that this will give homeowners more time to replace their fossil fuel heating systems with low-carbon alternatives such as heat pumps.

Natural gas boilers are a major barrier to reaching the UK's net zero target, producing 58.5 tons of carbon dioxide in a year from 28 million homes compared with the 56 million tons produced by 27 million cars.

The proposed ban will affect homeowners who want to install new boilers in existing homes after 2035 but there will not be an outright ban on gas boilers and no one will be forced to remove them from their homes.

Government is also planning as part of its Heat and Buildings Strategy to consult on whether it is appropriate to prevent new homes from being connected to the gas grid from 2035. This is instead of the expected move to energy efficient insulation to reduce heat loss and installing heating by low-carbon sources.

Energy Saving Trust has estimated that heat pumps are 3 to 4 times more efficient than traditional gas boilers and could save homeowners living in a 4-bedroom detached house around £395 to £425 a year.

However, they are expensive to buy and install, even with the BUS grant (see above). Current installation costs vary from £10,000 to £20,000. Government is looking at ways of reducing those costs to ensure that heat pumps will cost the same to buy and run as a gas boiler by 2030.

You can find more information here: www.homebuilding.co.uk/news/gas-boiler-ban



Climate Change Committee urges swift and decisive action



Progress towards reaching Net Zero in the UK

In its latest annual report to (CCC) concluded that policy development is too slow and confidence in the UK's ability to meet its medium-term targets for reaching Net Zero has declined.

The CCC set out a number of key messages for the Government:

A lack of urgency:

While there have been welcome developments in the policy framework such as the publication of the Carbon Budget Delivery Plan, this is not happening quickly enough to meet future targets.

Stay firm on existing commitments and move to delivery:

Government should restate its strong commitments and move as swiftly as possible towards delivery.

Retake a clear leadership role internationally:

The UK has lost its international leadership role and must work hard to regain it.

Immediate priority actions and policies:

Action is needed in a range of areas to cut carbon emissions.

Develop demand-side and land use policies:

Government's current strategy relies too much on specific technological solutions. This is risky since some of the solutions have not yet been deployed at scale.

Empower and inform households and communities to make low-carbon choices:

Although some progress has been made on giving advice on reducing energy use there is still a need for a coherent public engagement strategy.

Planning policy needs radical reform to support Net Zero:

The planning system should make sure that all planning decisions consider the implications for achieving Net Zero.

Expansion of fossil fuel production is not in line with Net Zero:

Net Zero requires a move away from high carbon developments such as the proposed new coal mine in Cumbria.

The need for a framework to manage airport capacity:

Airport expansion has continued over recent years despite our assessment that no net airport expansion is needed in the UK.

You can read the full report here: www.theccc.org.uk/publication/2023-progress-report-to-parliament/#key-messages

MCS confirms plans for scheme development

Following six weeks' consultation with installers and other stakeholders, Microgeneration Certification Scheme (MCS) has announced plans to redevelop the scheme for the small-scale renewables sector. MCS received 178 responses to its consultation.

MCS put forward nine proposals to reform the scheme intended to 'place consumer protection at its heart'. These include:

- simplification of documents to make MCS more accessible to contractors;
- refining MCS Installation Standards to become solely technical requirements; and
- removing the mandatory requirement to purchase insurance-backed guarantees.

Only one of the nine proposals was not fully or partially supported. Respondents said that the use of the term "Pending Certification" for small contractors carrying out their first installation before becoming MCS certified could cause confusion. Moreover, they thought that these contractors would not be able to afford to take out the required £5,000 bond which would thus act as a barrier to entry.

An important change proposed by MCS concerned the assessments which govern the way that contractors gain and maintain their MCS certification. These will in future focus

on the quality of the systems which the contractors install rather than the supporting office paperwork. The number of assessments will be based on various indicators of risk.

Although MCS has said it will continue with its proposal for a Consumer Duty to replace the current role of the Consumer Codes it has said that, in response to stakeholders' responses, going forward this will have a different name and will be constituted differently. Many respondents criticized the proposals on the basis that, as proposed, the Consumer Duty would be little more than a tick-box exercise, lacking in substance and unenforceable.

MCS has also stated that its proposals for a 'MCS Guarantee' fund of last resort will be amended and further refined before being taken forward. This was an important part of the original consultation. Without this in place and without insurance-backed warranties to protect deposits and workmanship warranties, consumers will be left unprotected should things go wrong.

MCS has said that revised standards and associated documents and processes will be published before the end of 2023 and the new scheme will launch in the summer of 2024 following a period of transition.

You can read the full document here: mcs-certified.com/mcs-announces-plans-for-future-redevelopment/

Energy Saving Trust launches guide to solar panels

Energy Saving Trust has produced a guide to solar panels designed to help consumers interested in installing them to understand how the technology works, what the typical costs and savings are likely to be and how to find a trustworthy installer.

The guide explains how solar panels help to cut electricity bills through using the sun's free energy. Once the cost of installing the panels is covered (usually around £7,000) homeowners can expect to have cheaper bills for many years. Depending on where you live and how much time you stay at home during the day, typical savings over a year range from £300 to £565.

Another benefit of solar panels is that they help to reduce a home's carbon footprint, saving around 800kg in a year, and improve a home's energy efficiency rating.

The guide describes solar panels as simple to install (it usually takes 2 to 3 days) and says that they should last up to 25 years with little maintenance needed. It also gives tips on how to make the most out of a solar panel system, such as using more electricity during the day.

Homeowners can sign up for payments for any surplus generated and exported to the grid through the Smart Export Guarantee (SEG) or other export tariff. The guide makes it clear that homeowners can only qualify for these tariffs if the work is carried out by an MCS certified installer and have an MCS certificate.



You can find the guide here: energysavingtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Solar-guide-July-2023.pdf

British Gas advisers found giving misleading 'green' boiler advice

An investigation by openDemocracy has revealed that some British Gas advisers have been giving customers false information about the use of hydrogen to heat homes and its potential in terms of creating a greener future.

openDemocracy booked video and phone calls with three advisers about three different properties. The researchers each said that they currently had a gas boiler but wanted to know what other options were available because of their concern about climate change.

Among the misleading claims made by the sales advisers were:

- hydrogen will soon start to be rolled out across the UK, initially with a 20%/80% mix of hydrogen and natural gas
- the current range of boilers can easily be converted to burn 100% hydrogen instead of gas
- hydrogen will cut energy bills
- heat pumps are not suitable for four-bedroom house

The truth is that Government has not yet decided whether to permit a 20% hydrogen blend in the gas grid. A formal decision on hydrogen heating is not expected until 2026. Hydrogen ready boilers are still being trialled and are not yet on sale. A recent analysis by the climate change think tank E3G has suggested that a 20% hydrogen blend could raise gas bills by 16% (£100 to £200 a year) because hydrogen is much more expensive than natural gas.



Heat pumps can work well in larger properties providing they have good insulation, large radiators, a hot water cylinder and a suitable space outside for the pump. They provide a more environmentally friendly way to heat homes by running on electricity and bringing heat from outside for use indoors.

The Competition and Marketing Authority warned in May that: "Businesses marketing boilers as 'hydrogen-blend' or 'hydrogen-ready' risk greenwashing people into thinking that these products are more environmentally friendly than they really are." They are, in fact, technically the same and emit the same carbon dioxide emissions as standard gas boilers.

The Climate Change Committee has urged the Government to make electric heating the default solution and to reduce the potential role for hydrogen (see above). And energy experts have accused British Gas of using cynical sales tactics, prioritising targets for boiler sales over giving accurate information about heat pumps.

Government is also investigating the role that hydrogen pumps might play and other ways to cut the cost of electricity over the next 10 years. No decision will be made on hydrogen ready pumps which are cheaper to install (£1500 to £5,000) until 2026 and are not yet on sale.

You can read the full report here: www.opendemocracy.net/en/british-gas-centrica-hydrogen-ready-boilers-green-energy-heat-pumps/



5 Reasons to Join EVCC

1. Show homeowners you are competent, qualified and reliable, and serious about offering high standards of consumer protection
 2. Stand out from your competitors
 3. Be listed on the EVCC website and increase your exposure
 4. Get assistance with resolving consumer complaints
 5. Get access to guidance, training and model documents making technical and legal compliance straightforward
- You can find more about EVCC, including how to join, here: <https://www.electric-vehicle.org.uk/installers>

