

# Energy-saving: It's a social thing

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With energy bills again rising and the winter approaching, researchers from Keele University in the UK have found a positive way of helping householders to keep their energy costs down and houses warm.

Energy prices will continue to rise for British [consumers](#) and the government can do little about it, Energy Secretary Ed Davey has warned. The Lib Dem minister told the BBC he accepted that prices would go up, and some of the costs causing the rises were 'impossible to avoid'.

A multidisciplinary team of scientists and social scientists at Keele, headed by Professor Andrew Dobson, has worked for two years with households in Shrewsbury and Newcastle-under-Lyme in the UK on low-cost and low-tech approaches to saving [energy](#).

The Reducing Energy Consumption through Community Knowledge Networks (RECKN) project team found that consumers are sceptical of the commercial motives of the UK's Big Six energy companies, and are much more likely to trust advice that comes from friends, family, local companies and organisations, and the third sector.

Face-to-face discussion helps to cut through the often confusing range of offers and information with which consumers are bombarded, and the chance to ask questions provides the detailed advice and reassurance often absent from leaflets and other forms of written advice. As one householder commented, 'It's a minefield out there, so you end up doing nothing because there is so much choice'.

Research showed that householders are often far more knowledgeable than they realise about ways of saving energy. However, used to deferring to 'experts', they underestimate both their own skills and practices and their capacity to communicate them to others.

Professor Dobson said that, 'The key to releasing this potential lies in making energy use 'discussable' at convivial meetings where citizens can exchange tips and knowledge. As well as producing good energy outcomes, we found that these meetings increase confidence and the motivation to save energy, empower citizens, and increase community capacity.'

One participant commented, 'A face-to-face sharing of tips and ideas is really useful - there is something about being in a group and sharing the information'.

Participants speak for themselves in a 14-minute video – 'Energy-saving: it's a social thing' - that can be seen here: [www.recckn.org.uk/videos.htm](http://www.recckn.org.uk/videos.htm)

With energy and increasing pressure on household incomes at the top of the political agenda the RECCKN project is an indispensable resource for policy makers, citizens and consumers alike. Some of the findings from the RECCKN project and the implications for [energy policy](#) will shortly be published in a paper in the journal *Energy Policy*.

Provided by Keele University

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