

Saving energy in social housing

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Landlords should be helping their social-housing tenants improve the energy efficiency of their homes, according to research published in the *International Journal of Environment and Sustainable Development*. Given that warmth is commonly the greatest need for such tenant, habit the greatest barrier and money the greatest motivator improvements to heating systems and advice on how to use them most efficiently and effectively are needed.

Gesche M. Huebner of University College London, Energy Institute and colleagues at the University of Greenwich, have taken a broad approach to understanding domestic [energy](#) consumption and to identifying difficulties in energy reduction. The focused on several factors, including barriers and motivators for changing behaviour, comfort and comfort actions and knowledge about the heating system. Interviews with and questionnaires completed by social housing tenants in England provided them with important data about energy behaviour.

"Our data showed that tenants were to a large degree already engaged in energy-saving actions," the team reports. "Warmth was the most important aspect of comfort for the majority of tenants but about half of both comfort actions and actions against cold were not energy-intensive." They also found that force of "habit" was the most important barrier to changing wasteful behaviour to more sustainable domestic practices and that money rather than trying to be green was found, perhaps not surprisingly given the economic circumstances of the interviewees, as the greatest motivator.

The team found that one of the biggest problems was a lack of instruction on how to use the [heating system](#) in a dwelling most effectively. Often, people make assumptions about temperature variations and how thermostats work. Also, there is much deceived wisdom surrounding the idea that maintaining hot water at a high temperature somehow uses less energy than allowing it to cool and reheating it on demand and other such matters.

"Our results imply that social housing landlords have the responsibility to provide better instructions on the most efficient home operation," the team concludes. "They could play a large role in changing tenants' habits, for example when implementing physical changes to the dwelling."

More information: Huebner, G.M., Cooper, J., Moon, A., Maras, P. and Jones, K. (2014) 'Barriers towards reducing domestic energy consumption – findings of a study among social housing tenants', *Int. J. Environment and Sustainable Development*, Vol. 13, No. 4, pp.425–448.

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