

Test trial to use computer servers to heat homes

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An energy company is joining forces with a tech startup to harness computing power to heat homes in the Netherlands.

Eneco, a Dutch-based energy company with more than 2 million customers, said Tuesday it is installing "e-Radiators"—computer servers that generate heat while crunching numbers—in five homes across the Netherlands in a trial to see if their warmth could be a commercially viable alternative for traditional radiators.

The technology is the brainchild of the Dutch startup company Nerdalize, whose founders claim to have developed the idea after huddling near a laptop to keep warm after their home's thermostat broke and jokingly suggesting buying 100 laptops.

"Ten minutes later, we thought: 'That's not such a crazy idea,'" said Boaz Leupe, one of Nerdalize's founders.

Nerdalize says its e-Radiators offer companies or research institutes a cheaper alternative to housing servers in data centers. And because Nerdalize foots the power bill for the radiators, Eneco customers get the warmth they generate for free.

The companies said the environment wins, too, because energy is effectively used twice in the new system—to power the servers and to heat rooms.

The servers used in the system can be connected by cloud computing. Eneco said the computers will be used by institutions including the Leiden University Medical Center to run complex calculations in their research.

The trial will run at least through the end of the year. When it is completed, the companies will decide whether to make the system available to more customers.

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