

ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE INSTITUTE, OXFORD UNIVERSITY

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IMMEDIATE

Power to the people: householders get better feedback on energy use from Oxford University

At a time of rising energy prices and utility bills, more and more householders are asking themselves how they can save money. Oxford University and the UK Energy Research Centre today launch a new free online tool to help them. Initial trials with *imeasure* show wide variations (ten- to twenty-fold) in home energy use, suggesting major opportunities for savings.

Research suggests that simply providing people with better feedback on their energy use is one of the most cost-effective ways to produce savings. Oxford University's Environmental Change Institute (ECI) has designed a new free online energy tool called *imeasure* that provides more accurate information to householders. An initial trial of the *imeasure* tool has revealed there are wide variations in energy use and carbon emissions between apparently similar households – with a difference of up to 20 fold between the highest and lowest users.

The online tool *imeasure* is not a carbon calculator, but an energy-use monitor based on the gas and electricity meter readings entered by the householder. It provides immediate personalised results based on the amount of energy the householder has used and how much carbon dioxide this has produced.

A further distinction is that people can compare their results with those of other users, and get their 'carbon label'. An 'A' grade means that your household is on target for meeting the UK Government's aim of a 60 per cent carbon emission reduction whereas a 'G' grade means that you are three times higher than the average.

imeasure has been created by UKERC (the UK Energy Research Centre) and Oxford University's Environmental Change Institute, a national leader in domestic energy use. Researcher and co-inventor Catherine Bottrill, from the ECI, said: 'Everyone wants to find better ways to save energy, yet we have remarkably little public data about actual household energy use. Our *imeasure* tool is not only a chance for people to learn about their own energy use and save money, but also to contribute, anonymously, to a ground-breaking citizen science project. The more *imeasure* users we attract, the better our analysis will be.'

In spite of the plethora of carbon calculators available online to the public, an in-depth review of almost 30 of them by the ECI found many fall short of providing people with accurate and personalised information about their home energy use and carbon emissions.

Catherine Bottrill added: ‘There is very limited energy data available to study household energy use. The last dataset, the 1996 English Housing Condition Survey, is now over 10 years old and no longer relevant. We urgently need good current data to find ideas for creating a low carbon, money-saving household sector.’

Co-inventor Dr Russell Layberry, from the ECI, said: ‘We have carried out trials of *imeasure* over a year with 100 people, but now want to open it up to many more people to get a much stronger understanding of the patterns in household energy use. To encourage friendly competition, *imeasure* allows individuals to come together in their own “carbon clubs”, providing a leader board so that people can compete for the top spot in their group. A bit of playful competition can deliver valuable information for people, information that can lead to them saving hundreds of pounds.’

imeasure-user Andrew Jarrett said: ‘With *imeasure*, I have a simple, interactive and invaluable tool with which to monitor my household energy consumption each week. Being able to see how our energy-saving efforts translates into real carbon reductions is truly gratifying and highlights the extra efforts needed. We are enjoying the challenge of finding new ways to reduce consumption and beating the previous week's efforts.’

Householders can join *imeasure* at www.imeasure.org.uk.

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Notes to Editors

The Environmental Change Institute at Oxford University has one of the UK’s leading domestic energy research groups. The Lower Carbon Futures team produced the acclaimed 40% House Report, on reducing carbon emissions from the entire UK housing stock, and leads the national Demand Reduction theme for UKERC. www.eci.ox.ac.uk

The UK Energy Research Centre is the focal point for UK research on sustainable energy. It takes an independent, whole-systems approach, drawing on engineering, economics and the physical, environmental and social sciences. The Centre's role is to promote cohesion within the overall UK energy research effort. It acts as a bridge between the UK energy research community and the wider world, including business, policymakers and the international energy research community and is the centrepiece of the Research Councils Energy Programme. www.ukerc.ac.uk