

Domestic energy efficiency: Consumers in the dark

New market research from the Ashdown Group has indicated that consumers across Europe are not fully aware of the impact of household appliances on domestic energy consumption. The research suggests that extending energy labelling schemes to more domestic appliances, such as televisions, would be welcomed by consumers and enable them to make more informed choices when purchasing appliances and help improve efficiency.

Domestic energy consumption – A matter of concern

The Ashdown Group survey indicates that more than 60% of people in the EU strongly feel that the way they conduct their everyday lives is significantly affecting the environment. 4000 people from all age ranges were surveyed in Spain, the UK, France and the Czech Republic to give an impression of attitudes across Europe. This belief was even stronger amongst the young as 72% of 18-24 year olds feel that everyday activity is significantly damaging.

EU energy statistics suggest that this is a valid concern. Domestic energy use increased by 16% between 1990 and 2005 and is responsible for approximately 27% of the EU's total energy consumption.¹ As consumers purchase more household appliances, domestic energy use is expected to increase further.

Improving energy efficiency and reducing consumption is becoming increasingly important as the effects of climate change become clearer, traditional energy supplies become more limited, and energy prices continue to rise across Europe.

Consumer awareness of the energy impact of domestic appliances

When asked to list the most energy consuming appliances most respondents mentioned fridge-freezers, washing machines, dishwashers and microwave ovens.

However, in reality it is televisions that make a particularly large contribution to overall energy use. In 2005 televisions accounted for 54,000 GWh of energy consumed in the EU – equivalent to almost 63 million tonnes of oil.²

A 32" LCD TV consumes more electricity in a year than any of the others. A 42" plasma TV consumes almost double that of a fridge-freezer.³

In the European Union energy consumption from TVs is predicted to increase 115% by 2020, unless measures are introduced to improve the efficiency of products. This is because the average number of televisions per household, and the average size of those televisions is increasing. Larger televisions, which often utilise plasma or LCD technology, tend to consume more energy than smaller traditional Cathode Ray Tube (CRT) sets.

Yet only 35% of respondents identified televisions as one of the most energy consuming appliances.

This is perhaps not surprising. Currently TV manufacturers provide little information on the energy efficiency of their products, and what information is provided is often confusing. Indeed, the National Consumer Council in the UK has reported that "there is an almost complete lack of information for consumers who want to make green choices [when purchasing consumer electronics]."⁴

¹ European Commission Directorate-General for Energy and Transport, "Energy and Transport in Figures: 2007", Table 2.6.1

² Figures calculated using Department of Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Figures (<http://www.berr.gov.uk/energy/statistics/source/notes/page18916.html>) and Fraunhofer IZM, EuP Preparatory Study Lot 5 (TV), Final Report Task 8

³ <http://www.carbonfootprint.com/energyconsumption.html>

⁴ Lucy Yates, National Consumer Council, "Information Blackout: why electronics consumers are in the dark."

The lack of awareness about the efficiency of televisions suggests that consumers would benefit from more information about the extent to which TVs consume energy, in the same way that existing A-G ratings for White Goods have positively influenced purchasing decisions in favour of more energy efficient products.

Clear, reliable information on the energy efficiency of televisions would enable consumers to make a more informed choice when purchasing a new set.

The benefits to consumers of energy labelling

Results of the survey indicate that energy labels are seen as a clear and trusted source of information on the efficiency of products. 47% of respondents felt that an independent energy labelling scheme was the most important source of information when choosing an energy efficient domestic appliance, compared with just 14% for the manufacturers' point of sale material.

A number of studies have demonstrated that energy labelling has resulted in an increased take-up of energy efficient products, and the survey supported these findings. 1 in 5 people stated that energy labels were "the first thing they considered when shopping for an electrical appliance." In France, 36% of respondents felt this way.

It is estimated that since mandatory labelling was first introduced in 1996 the average energy efficiency of refrigerators and freezers, washing machines and dryers purchased in Europe has improved by 20–35%.

The European Commission is currently using the Energy Using Products (EuP) Directive to look at ways of improving the energy efficiency of a number of different product areas, including televisions. A recent report undertaken by Fraunhofer IZM on behalf of the European Commission recommended that introducing a mandatory energy labelling scheme for TVs would significantly improve efficiency.

The cost of energy efficiency to the consumer

It is possible to significantly improve the efficiency of televisions without adversely affecting manufacturers, retailers or consumers.

The Fraunhofer report has estimated that significant improvements in the energy efficiency of TVs could be achieved with little additional cost to manufacturers.

However the survey suggests that consumers are so keen to purchase more energy efficient products that they will pay extra. 70% of respondents indicated that they were prepared to pay a premium of up to 5% for the most efficient television sets. 53% would pay up to an additional 10%.

Summary

- **Consumers are not fully aware of the extent to which different appliances use energy. This is particularly true for TVs.**
- **As a result improvements in energy efficiency will only occur if manufacturers are required to provide consumers with clear and reliable information on their products.**
- **Energy labelling has been in use for certain products in the EU for over a decade and in that time has been shown to have a significant impact in improving efficiency. Energy labels are now sought out by consumers, and are one of the primary considerations when purchasing certain products.**
- **Mandatory energy labelling should be extended to more domestic appliances. Introducing labelling for televisions would be an effective, yet achievable, means of improving energy efficiency and should be brought in at the earliest opportunity.**