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UK government announces green makeover for every home by 2030

Environment minister unveils 'great British refurb' to cut household emissions one-third by 2020 with insulation and low-carbon technologies

Alok Jha, green technology correspondent
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Millions of British homes will be insulated under government plans. Photograph: Graham Turner

All UK households will have a green makeover by 2030 under government plans to reduce carbon emissions and cut energy bills.

Cavity wall and loft insulation will be available for all suitable homes, with plans to retrofit 400,000 homes a year by 2015. Financial incentives for householders will also be available for low-carbon technologies such as solar panels, biomass boilers and ground source heat pumps, paid for by a levy on utility companies.

The government wants a quarter of homes (7m) to benefit from the schemes by 2020, extending to all UK households by 2030.

The strategy could help cut household carbon emissions by a third by 2020, part of its target to reduce overall UK emissions by 80% by 2050. Currently, homes account for 27% of the UK's carbon emissions through heating and power.

The plans were welcomed in principle by green groups and energy campaigners, though many were still concerned by the lack urgency in the proposals – which might only begin in 2013 – or detail on how the majority of the plans will be funded.

Energy and climate change secretary Ed Miliband said: "We need to move from incremental steps forward on household energy efficiency to a comprehensive national plan – the Great British refurb."

"We know the scale of the challenge: wasted energy is costing families on average £300 a year, and more than a quarter of all our emissions are from our homes. Energy efficiency and low-carbon energy are the fairest routes to curbing emissions, saving money for families, improving our energy security and insulating us from volatile fossil

fuel prices."

Under the proposals, a Renewable Heating Incentive would tax utility companies and then use the money to build up smaller-scale energy networks. A spokesman for the [Department of Energy and Climate Change \(DECC\)](#) said the levy, intended to start in 2011, would not affect today's [household bills](#). "We have to consult on how it will work and, in fact, our proposals would have little impact on prices for many years, apart from cutting billing for those who take up the offer of help."

In addition, householders could be paid for any electricity they feed into the national grid from their power-generating facilities.

Paul King, chief executive of the [UK Green Building Council \(UKGBC\)](#) said the proposals were suitably ambitious but also needed the Treasury behind them. "As [Lord Stern said yesterday](#), energy efficiency in homes and buildings should be part of a green stimulus. Financial incentives are needed to encourage major green refurbishments – the precedent has already been set with stamp duty rebates for zero-carbon homes."

According to [Greenpeace UK](#), a programme to upgrade the housing stock alone would require £3.5-£6.5bn per year until 2050. Nathan Argent, head of energy solutions at Greenpeace, said: "Tackling energy efficiency is the fastest way to cut emissions, boost our energy security, revitalise the economy and create tens of thousands of jobs. And, obviously, this will cut household bills too. But this plan needs much more investment right now. The government needs to put their wallet where their mouth is."

Andrew Warren of the [Association for the Conservation of Energy](#) was concerned that the government had redefined the meaning of insulation to meet the target, set by Gordon Brown last year, of getting 6m homes fully insulated over three years.

"Most people think of insulation as the stuff you shove in your loft or put around your walls," he said. The current DECC definition, he said, can also include draft-proofing of letterboxes or replacing windows. "At the moment, even by the most generous interpretation, you're not even halfway towards the 6m [target announced by Gordon Brown].."

Danny Stevens, policy director of the [Environmental Industries Commission](#) said that setting targets for energy efficiency was not enough. "All we have today is the launch of yet another consultation. This undermines the urgency of tackling climate change and ignores the huge economic benefits of ambitious environmental protection measures."

That sentiment was echoed by Philip Sellwood, chief executive of the [Energy Saving Trust \(EST\)](#), who said the time for talking is now over. "We are not short of ideas; we just need action and now. Armed with the knowledge that 70% of our current housing stock will still be around in 2050, we know we need to be bold."

He added: "If we throw everything at our existing housing stock – based on today's technologies only – we could reduce household carbon emissions by 50%."

The EST said there are 7.3m cavity walls that could be filled with insulation, 7m solid walls that could be insulated, and 12.9m lofts which do not have the recommended depth of insulation, and 4.5m G-rated (the least efficient) gas boilers.

Shadow energy and climate change secretary Greg Clark said the government was "delaying rather than getting on and adopting our scheme immediately, when it is desperately needed." Last month, the [Conservatives proposed giving an allowance of up to £6,500 to every household in the UK for energy efficiency improvements](#).

Today's DECC strategy also includes ideas to encourage microgeneration, where homeowners and local communities generate their own heat or power.

