

September 29, 2008

Irish Households Face Long Cold Winter As Energy Costs Soar

Filed in ConstructionGovernmentEnvironmental on September 29, 2008

The Renewable Energy Skills Skillnet (RESS) claims that the combination of shrinking purchasing power, energy inefficient homes, an inadequate fuel allowance scheme and forecasts of a colder winter than last year will leave many Irish families unable to afford the recent and imminent hikes in energy costs.

The industry-led organisation states, for example, that on average a fill of a tank of home heating oil will cost EUR800, compared to EUR600 in 2007.

RESS has now called on the Government and Local Authorities across the country to examine ways of alleviating the pressures on the elderly and low-income households to heat their homes during the coming months.

‘It is incumbent on the Government to ensure that vulnerable sections of the community are provided with as much assistance as possible. In particular, it should look at increasing the winter fuel allowance, which operates for 30 weeks from September to April’, said Johnny Flynn, RESS Chairperson.

He continued, ‘The existing fuel allowance of EUR18 a week barely covers the cost of a bag of coal, which would not even keep the smallest of homes heated for a week. While RESS acknowledges that the fuel allowance has doubled since 2006, we would ask the Minister for Social and Family Affairs to consider a further increase to help alleviate the effects of fuel poverty.’

Mr. Flynn, who is an Environmentalist, Engineer and Town Councillor in Ennis, added, ‘The Government and Sustainable Energy Ireland should consider expanding the Greener Homes Scheme to include local authority rented accommodation units. Long-term tenants should be entitled to individually apply for grants to improve energy efficiency and to incorporate renewable technologies in their homes.’

Mr. Flynn pointed out that Local Authorities could also play a significant role in helping householders to heat their homes.

He said, ‘RESS urges all Local Authorities to prepare contingency plans to assist tenants in meeting high-energy costs and heating their homes. This is particularly the case for known urban banks of poorly insulated social housing units. The time to act is now and not when we are in the middle of this impending crisis.’

Meanwhile, RESS has warned that Ireland will struggle to achieve building efficiency ratings of 60 per cent within ten years, as envisaged by the EU.

The organisation, utilising figures from a new report by the Irish Institute for International and European Affairs, said it would cost Ireland an estimated EUR50 billion to achieve this target by 2018.

Dick Whelan, RESS Project Leader, said the introduction of environmentally sound construction methods and materials in the building of new homes was being undermined by the fact that approximately one million or two thirds of Irish homes built before 1997 were poorly insulated and energy inefficient, and nowhere near meeting national energy efficiency targets.

Mr. Whelan stated that householders across the country were continuing to waste millions of Euro each year on heating

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poorly insulated homes and the situation was unlikely to improve without intervention by the Government and Local Authorities.

‘Apart from reducing fuel and electricity bills, a more energy-efficient home will help Ireland to meet its legally-binding climate change commitments and provide greater protection for householders against future increases in fuel costs, as well as making the use of renewable energy technologies a more practical option’, concluded Mr. Whelan.

RESS was set up in 2004 to provide training and support to plumbing and heating contractors and related trades and professionals involved in the design, specification, installation and maintenance of Renewable Energy Heating Systems. The network offers FETAC accredited courses in Building Energy Rating, Biomass, Solar and Heatpump technologies as well as training in a wide range of other related topics.

Meanwhile, RESS will host the 4th National Renewable Energy Heating Conference in The Shannon Shamrock Conference Centre, Bunratty, Co Clare on Friday 17th October 2008.

The key focus of this year’s conference, which will feature a keynote address from Mr. Tom Parlon, Director General of the Construction Industry Federation, will be the promotion of quality assurance within the renewable energy heating industry. National and international experts will explore its importance and benefits in the design, supply and installation of renewable energy heating technologies both in Ireland and abroad.

Michael Kitt, Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and TD for Galway East, will also address the conference.

Persons interested in attending the Conference, the Gala Award Dinner or attending any of the renewable energy training events provided nationally should visit www.renewableenergy.ie, call 061 514 598 or email info@renewableenergy.ie.

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Notes to Editors:

- For further information please contact Dick Whelan of RES on 086-8198188 or Mark Dunphy of Dunphy Public Relations on 086-8534900 or media@dunphypr.com

- Renewable Energy Skills is funded by members companies and the Training Networks Programme initiative of Skillnets Ltd, which is funded from the national training fund through the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. For more on Renewable Energy Skills log on to www.renewableenergy.ie.

- Skillnets is an enterprise led body that was set up in April 1999 to assist companies in addressing their training and development needs. Skillnets is responsible for the operation of The Training Networks Programme. Since 1999, Skillnets has funded over 150 Training Networks and supported over 10,000 companies to meet their training needs. 50,000 staff and managers have participated in raising their skills levels and 30 different industry sectors have been involved. These opportunities for developing human potential can underpin the competitiveness of firms as well as increase the long term career opportunities and employability of employees.

Website www.skillnets.ie

- FETAC, the Further Education and Training Awards Council is the national awarding body for further education and training in Ireland, (FETAC) gives people the opportunity to gain recognition for learning in education or training centres, in the work place and in the community. Website www.fetac.ie

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