



August 2014 | Energy Efficiency and Expenses

Every month we invite a response to our short, 3 question survey. Our survey for August 2014 was in relation to energy efficiency and costs for people parenting alone or sharing parenting. The aim of the survey was to find out if those parenting alone have energy efficient measures in their homes, to ascertain the extent to which they may be in arrears with their energy supplier, and to highlight the potential impact of these arrears.

The Questions

1. Do you have any of these energy efficiency measures installed in your home? (Insulation – loft, cavity walls, floors, etc; draught-proofing of the windows and doors; use of low voltage lamps; insulation of the hot water cylinder)
2. Are you in arrears with your energy supplier? If yes, please explain by how much you are in arrears and how this has impacted on you.
3. Do you have central heating in your home? If yes, do you use your central heating system and how often?

The Results

Figure 1

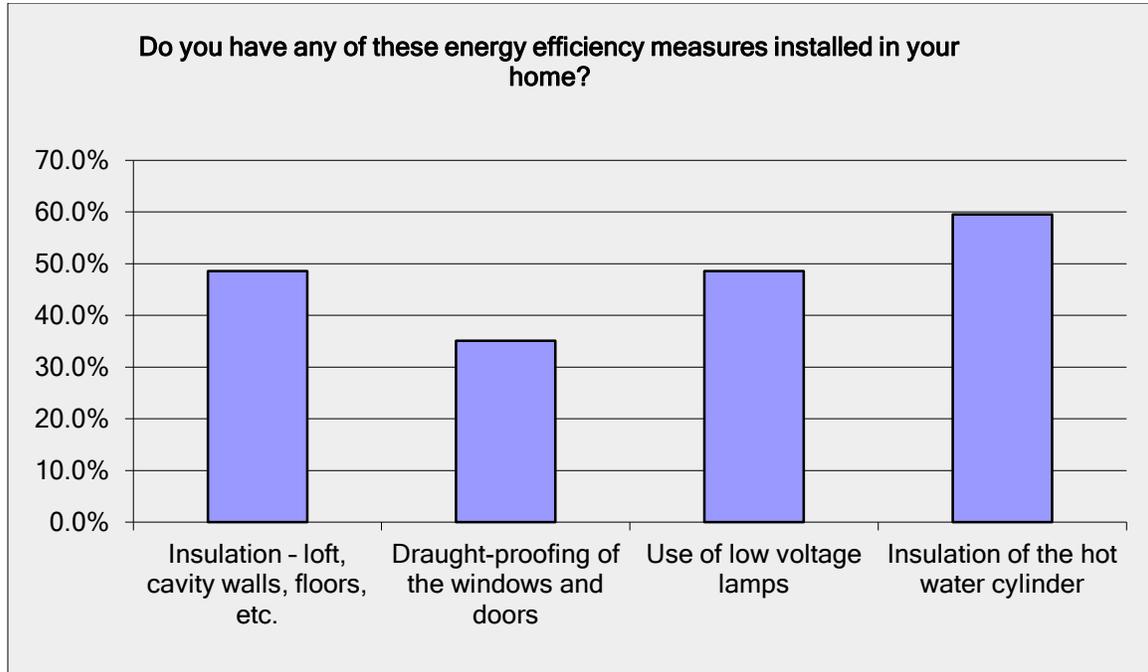


Figure one above shows that almost half (48%) of those surveyed have both insulation and low voltage light bulbs in their homes. Almost two thirds (60%) stated that they also had insulation around their hot water cylinder. Only one third (35%) of respondents

have draught-proofing in their homes. One respondent spoke about the difficulties of living in a home with no draught-proofing measures in place.

“The front door is falling apart and lets in a gale and there is a huge draught that blows through the whole house when it is windy and there is a problem with cracks on the exterior wall which has caused dampness in my sitting room. It is a palace compared to the last place I rented though which was so damp I couldn't keep clothes from going mouldy, water streamed down the inside of my then toddler's wardrobe ruining her clothes, the place was full of mice... a nightmare.”

Figure 2



As shown in Figure two, over one third of respondents (36%) are in arrears with their energy supplier for gas or electricity. Those with meters installed to help manage energy costs are still finding it difficult to keep on top of arrears in addition to their current energy charges.

“I got a meter to help pay the bill but what they are doing is taking half of what I buy in tokens to pay off the debt. So for example I buy a €10 top up, they take €4.80 off the debt and €1.80 off emergency credit and €4 euro for gas!!! Where is the incentive to get another top up?”



“Am in minus with my pre-pay power, waiting for it to turn off, none till tomorrow till paid. It’s very upsetting being a single mother not able to even have enough to pay for electricity every week.”

Falling into arrears has resulted in many people parenting alone feeling stressed and worried about how they will manage their energy costs, particularly as we approach the winter months.

“It is a struggle. I am concerned about this winter coming.”

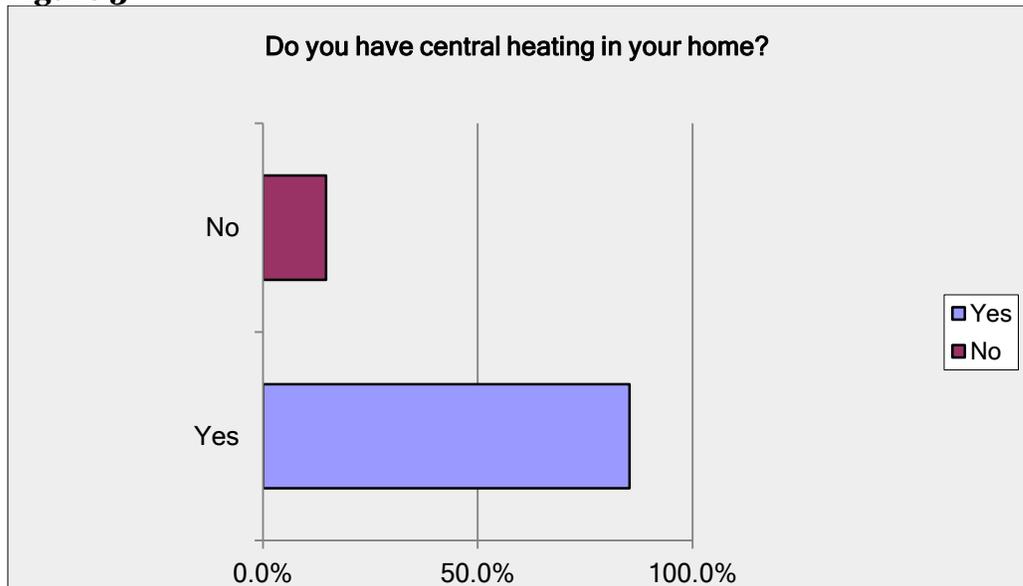
“I am still paying off last winter’s bill with €150 to go and winter is nearly here again!”

The remaining 64% of those surveyed are not in arrears. A number of respondents spoke about the importance of budgeting energy costs to avoid accumulating debt with their energy supplier. Contrary to other respondents, many people felt that meters have helped them to stay out of arrears and manage their energy costs more effectively.

“In 2010 when I first had my daughter all bills started to come in thick and fast, and I was going in arrears. So I sat down and did a budget plan so nowadays I pre pay most of my bills so when winter heating bills come in, I generally have them in credit or need to add very little to it. Budget, budget, budget everything!!!”

“I have prepay meters installed for both gas and electricity. Very efficient method of managing such costs.”

Figure 3





The majority of those surveyed have central heating in their home (85%; see Figure 3). However, a large number of respondents only heat their homes when absolutely necessary, or not at all, in order to keep energy costs down.

“Use it between end Oct to end Feb/beginning of March. Don't use otherwise, we wear jumpers/additional layers to keep warm.”

“I only use it when it is extremely cold(Dec/Jan) as I used it a lot one winter and it made my ESB bill so high that I couldn't pay it without starting a payment plan....it cost me nearly €1,000 to heat the house for the winter. So now I just use the open fire and stove in the kitchen which I am very lucky to have and we wear jumpers to bed in the winter and have 2 duvets on each bed as the heat doesn't spread to other rooms in the house.”

“As little as humanly possible. From around late Oct to Apr, only for an hour or two after school.”

“Cannot afford to adequately heat the home during winter - have to limit use to a couple of hours a day. Often have to wait weeks in freezing weather to refill oil as can't afford oil. Often have to borrow money from relatives to heat home. I'm dreading the winter this year, constantly being cold in the house and stressing about how I'm going to pay for oil.”

“Very rarely use it, only in the depths of winter. Maybe 5-7 days per year.”

A small number of those surveyed use their central heating system on a regular basis, despite the associated costs.

“Every day to heat water for showers and cooking. High usage during autumn and winter months. During Summer cost per month on average €80-90. Other seasonal usage e.g. Winter, cost increases to €150 per month.”

In conclusion, only half of those surveyed have energy efficient measures in their homes. This indicates a need for increased awareness about the importance of installing these measures in homes across Ireland. In particular, landlords renting out private accommodation should have these measures in place as standard.

Increased education is needed around managing energy costs. However, it is also clear from this month's survey that once a person falls into arrears, for any reason, it is very difficult to get out of the cycle of debt which follows. It is both shocking and worrying that many of those surveyed cannot afford to heat their homes during the winter months. Both the government and utility companies need to work together to find a solution to the issues highlighted here without delay.