



Warmer homes

How to tackle **fuel poverty** in your area.



A guide for **community and campaign groups**



Scotland's champion
for our environment.

Fuel poverty

How to tackle it in your community

A person in the UK is living in fuel poverty if, to heat their home to a satisfactory standard, they would need to spend more than 10 per cent of their household income on fuel.

Around 900,000 households in Scotland - more than 1 in 3 - are estimated to be in fuel poverty.

Source: Energy Action Scotland

It's most common among people who might spend a lot of time at home – elderly people, unemployed people or single parents.

Fuel poverty can be more likely in rural areas where a higher proportion of households are not connected to the gas mains.

It's a stressful position to be in, and has a detrimental effect on people's health and wellbeing.

This booklet is designed to be a resource for you and your friends, community or campaign group if you want to reduce fuel poverty in your area. It also has some helpful information for you if you think you are struggling to keep your own home warm.

At Friends of the Earth Scotland, we want a healthy environment for everyone. This means finding ways of living that reduce poverty and waste less of the Earth's resources. People often think that looking after the planet means going back to the dark ages, but we think that it means using our resources well to make sure the most vulnerable people are looked after – both here and around the world.

Why do so many people struggle to heat their homes?

Low household income. The costs of heating are not very flexible, so they form a greater proportion of a low income.

Fuel costs. Higher prices reduce the affordability of fuel. Also, some types of fuel cost more than others, but the availability of different fuels varies in different areas of the country, and is limited by the type of heating system you have. This affects people's ability to choose the cheapest form of heating.

Energy efficiency. The energy efficiency of the building and of the heating source determines the amount of energy that must be used to heat your home.



Homes which are hardest to heat

Older buildings

Owners often can't apply for available insulation schemes or grant assistance for insulation because their house or flat does not have cavity walls or has no loft, making insulating it more complicated. Homes in rural areas may also have no connection to the gas mains.

Private rented accommodation

Energy efficiency of rented homes is below average because neither tenants nor landlords usually want to spend money on improving insulation. Tenants don't want to because they would be investing in someone else's property, and landlords don't tend to because they don't live in the building, don't pay the fuel bills and so wouldn't feel the direct benefits of any work they invest in.

Why it's a real problem

We all know how horrible it is when you can't seem to keep warm. But living like this through a long winter in Scotland can have serious affects on people's health and wellbeing.

Colder homes can lead to a higher chance of ill health such as heart disease, stroke, influenza and asthma. Compared to colder Northern European and Scandinavian countries, Scotland has a higher winter death rate mainly due to our less thermally efficient homes. This means less protection from the cold for the most vulnerable.

Struggling to pay high fuel bills, and trying to keep warm can also lead to anxiety and depression.

In addition to this, damp conditions can cause mould growth on cold surfaces and increase the risk of dry rot and attack from wood boring insects. This can damage furniture, meaning people need to replace things more often, costing more money.

What's being done about this already?

The best way of keeping warm is to increase the energy efficiency of our homes, as this will provide a long-term solution. Things like insulation, more efficient boilers and other energy efficiency measures can be really effective. **The good news is that the Scottish Government has a target to eradicate fuel poverty by 2016.** There is help available – ranging from grants, loans, energy efficiency packages and benefits advice - from a number of sources, details of which can be found later in this booklet.



Exterior cladding can help insulate an older home.



Eco friendly insulation can be put into false walls in an old home.

So how can we help in our local community?

There are different approaches you could take to tackling fuel poverty in your area. Here are some ideas and information to help get you started.

Raising awareness, accessing help

You could put your efforts into raising awareness of the help available to individuals, and encourage them to seek this out. **Think about people in your area— where might you be able to chat to people who are struggling to heat their homes?** How would they like to be approached? Other organisations have found that using the term ‘fuel poverty’ can sometimes put people off accessing help. What other language could you use?



There is help available for people struggling to heat their homes, but does everyone know about it?

Could you produce a leaflet about help available to private tenants and persuade letting agents to give them out to their customers?

Or could you go to community groups, bingo halls, churches or bowling greens, to talk to people about how well their privately owned home is insulated?



A campaigner at 'The Wave' climate change March in Glasgow. Campaigning can be an effective way of changing things.

Running a campaign

Sometimes it can be very effective to persuade councils or governments to take action, instead of setting something up yourselves. This takes time and effort, but can have far reaching benefits. For example, local authorities have the power to insist that private landlords provide good insulation for their homes under Part 1 of the Housing Act 2004 through the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). What if you persuaded your local council to make sure privately rented homes are well insulated? It could benefit all the tenants in your area!

We have plenty of resources to help you to research and run a campaign. To start with, take a look at our campaigning resources at <http://tinyurl.com/foes-guide> for advice on planning a campaign.

Also, get in touch with the Friends of the Earth Scotland office for more help on 0131 243 2700.

Help available for individuals

If you want to raise awareness in your area, these organisations can supply you with help and information.

Home improvements and energy saving

The Energy Saving Trust (EST) is a place to find out about the government's schemes to help people to get better insulation, and they'll check if someone is in a position to get financial assistance with any work that needs doing. They can also give advice on reducing energy that may be going to waste.

Tel: 0800 512 012

Web: www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/



The financial side of things

Energy Best Deal

This group can help you to make sure you are getting the best deal on your energy tariff – it's amazing how much people can save by switching supplier or tariff. They also offer training to groups wanting to share information or raise awareness.

Tel 0141 226 5261

Web www.consumerfocus.org.uk/scotland/policy-research/energy/energy-best-deal-scotland

Consumer Direct

This is a government helpline providing information and advice on energy supply complaints for domestic customers. Phone if you are having a problem with your supplier and for information on how to take forward a complaint.

Tel 08454 040506

Web www.consumerdirect.gov.uk

If you want to apply for funding to run a project or campaign in your area

The EAGA Charitable Trust

This trust gives grants to groups working to relieve fuel poverty.

Tel 01539 736477

Web www.eagacharitabletrust.org/

ScottishPower Energy Peoples Trust

This trust invites applications for funding from groups trying to alleviate fuel poverty, particularly working with households with young children.

To apply for funding you can request an application form.

Tel 0141 568 3492

Web www.energypeopletrust.com

What action locally means for global environmental justice

Reducing fuel poverty in your area not only benefits people who are struggling to heat their homes. It also means the energy we use in Scotland isn't wasted. This is important because the gas, coal or oil we use for heating comes to us at a cost. Friends of the Earth groups around the world are highlighting the damage to human rights and the environment that often come with fossil fuel extraction.



Members of Friends of the Earth International members march for Climate Justice in Copenhagen, 2009.

Campaigners point out that communities near fossil fuel projects usually do not benefit much financially, and pay a high price when their environment is polluted.

Environmentalists can sometimes sound like we want everyone to turn down their heating, not up. This may be relevant if you are healthy and are over-heating your home. As a society, however, it's important that we use precious and finite resources for the right things – such as making sure people are keeping warm when they might be vulnerable – while reducing our energy use on things we don't need. It's all about making a

transition to a low carbon society in a way that benefits everyone, in Scotland and across the world.

About Friends of the Earth Scotland

We are an independent Scottish charity working for a healthy environment for everyone. We are part of the biggest environmental grassroots network in the world – there are Friends of the Earth groups in 76 different countries. Local groups across Scotland campaign for a fairer, greener local area, and join in our national campaigns, which are about tackling the root causes of problems like climate change. You can join us as a community group, sign up to receive emails or become a member by visiting www.foe-scotland.org.uk. We'd be very happy to work with you to make our shared future a bright one.



Friends of the Earth Falkirk work together on lots of environmental projects in their town.

