14 Million Households Went Cold This Winter to Cope With Sky-High Energy Bills

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- **14.3 million households[1] went cold at some point this winter to reduce their energy bills, with 6.3 million[2] regularly going without heating**
- **Nearly two-fifths (37%) of consumers admitted that rationing their energy use had affected their health or quality of life[3]**
- **Rather than switching on the heating, 42% of consumers say they left their oven door open after cooking and 24% wore a coat, scarf or hat indoors to keep warm[4]**
- **Despite some price reductions by energy suppliers earlier this year, almost half (49%) of customers think they will have no impact on bills[5]**
- **uSwitch.com is urging the Government to extend the Warm Home Discount to help the 4.8 million 'fuel vulnerable' households who spend over 10% of their income on energy[6].**

Over 14 million[1] UK homes have admitted to going cold over the winter due to the sky-high cost of energy, according to new research from uSwitch.com, the price comparison and switching service.

Over half (54%) of UK households say they went without heating at some point over the winter[1], with nearly a quarter (24%) doing so on a regular basis[2]. Alarmingly, almost two-fifths of consumers (37%) admit that rationing their energy use affected their health or quality of life[3].

According to the new survey, consumers used a variety of methods to avoid switching on the heating over the winter. Over eight in ten (83%) put on more layers and 65% used a blanket when sitting down[4]. Alongside more conventional methods to keep warm, 42% left the over door open after cooking, 24% wore a coat, scarf or hat indoors, and 7% went to public places such as coffee shops[4].

Despite modest price reductions by some energy suppliers earlier this year, 49% of customers think these will have no impact on their bills[5]. With the average UK home set to spend an eye-watering £1,242 on energy this year – £705 more than a decade ago[7] – it's little wonder that a staggering 83% of households are still concerned about the cost of their energy bills[8].

The new findings come just weeks after uSwitch.com revealed that 4.8 million British homes are 'fuel vulnerable' – by spending more than 10% of their income on energy[6]. uSwitch.com has called on the Government to extend the Warm Home Discount scheme, which gives a £140 a year discount to eligible consumers, to help more fuel vulnerable households with their energy bills. Despite recent proposals for standardised eligibility criteria, suppliers still have varying rules about who qualifies for the discount. In addition, many small energy providers, who frequently undercut the big six suppliers on price, are not currently included in the scheme.

Ann Robinson, Director of Consumer Policy at uSwitch.com, says: "It's simply unacceptable that people should feel forced to gamble with their health to try and cope with sky-high energy bills. It's all very well for some suppliers to cut prices when spring kicks in, but millions of consumers were left out in the cold this winter.

"It's now high time for proper, double-digit reductions to be passed onto hard-pressed customers – many of whom have gone cold because they can't afford to keep the heating on. In the meantime, consumers should take control by making sure their home is as energy efficient as possible and checking that they're on the most competitive tariff.

"Our latest figures reveal that over 4.8 million fuel vulnerable households spend a staggering 10% or more of their income on energy. The Government must urgently extend the Warm Home Discount scheme to help more consumers struggling with energy costs."

For more information visit www.uswitch.com or call 0800 093 06 07

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Notes to editors

Research carried out online with the uSwitch.com Consumer Opinion Panel in March 2015 amongst a sample of 1,000 GB adults.

1. In response to 'Have you gone cold at home this winter due to the cost of energy?' 54% answered yes. 54% x 26.4 million households (ONS figures, 2013) = 14.3 million households.

2. In response to 'Have you gone without heating this winter to keep your energy costs down?' 21% answered regularly, 3% answered always = 24%. 24% x 26.4 million households (ONS figures, 2013) = 6.3 million households

3. In response to 'Do you think you're achieving the right balance this winter between keeping your home warm and managing costs?' 37% answered no – the cut backs I'm making are affecting my quality of life and/or health.

4. In response to 'Have you done any of the following to keep warm this winter rather than put on the heating? (tick all that apply)'. 83% answered dressed in more layers, 65% answered used a blanket when sitting down, 42% answered left the over door open after cooking, 24% wore a hat/scarf/coat indoors, 12% gone to visit friends/family, 7% answered gone to public places such as libraries/coffee bars.

5. In response to 'Considering the recent reductions to standard energy tariffs by some energy suppliers, to what extent do you think they will make an impact on your bills?' 49% answered it will make no difference to my bills

6. See full data on numbers of fuel vulnerable customers from the uSwitch media centre:

7. Figures based on average energy consumption on the average of big six suppliers' dual fuel standard tariffs, paying on receipt of bill in April 2015 (£1,242) and January 2005 (£537)

8. In response to 'Are you concerned about the cost of your winter energy bill?' 83% answered yes.

About us

uSwitch is an online and telephone price comparison and switching service, helping consumers get a better deal on gas, electricity, home phone, broadband, digital television, mobile phones and personal finance products including mortgages, credit cards, current accounts and insurance.

Energy customers have the option to create an account to automatically monitor the market and notify them when they can move to a cheaper tariff - making future comparisons even simpler and faster. Broadband customers can conduct aspeed test to find out how fast their broadband is and to identify the best broadband provider for their postcode.

uSwitch was the first comparison site to achieve the Plain English Campaign's Internet Crystal Mark, recognising that it has clear language, is accessible and easy to use.

uSwitch has a UK contact centre which is manned by energy and broadband experts. The 'Send Us Your Bill' service allows customers to post their latest energy bills to FREEPOST USWITCH in order to receive a free call back to be guided through the comparison process. Alternatively, consumers can email customerservices@uswitch.com with their postcode and usage details. uSwitch's address is Notcutt House, 36 Southwark Bridge Rd, London, SE1 9EU.

uSwitch is backed by LDC, the leading UK mid-market private equity house, and Forward Internet Group Limited, a privately funded collection of internet-based businesses focused on consumer engagement and innovation.

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