

Improving Health and well-being

Our increasingly elderly population is particularly vulnerable to the cold and to respiratory diseases. The UK has an unenviable record of excess winter death rates far above those of countries with a similar climate. At the extreme is the problem of hypothermia, but many more of these deaths are the result of cold-related illnesses. If this problem is to be solved energy must be used more efficiently to reduce bills and increase the comfort of the elderly.

Children are another vulnerable group. Cold, damp housing can cause or exacerbate specific illness, in particular respiratory illness and cardio-vascular disease. Condensation dampness produces mould which, in turn, can trigger asthmatic attacks and lead to allergic reactions and bronchial diseases. Findings from research projects indicate that there is a considerable health gain from heating, ventilation and insulation improvement.

In addition, living in a cold, damp home can have a detrimental effect on mental health, it is a deeply depressing experience. Worrying about paying for fuel bills can also increase anxiety and stress levels and energy projects can therefore also deliver benefits to mental and psychological health.

Finally, improvement in energy efficiency could save millions of pounds for the NHS. If cold-related illnesses are reduced, then the cost of treatment is reduced. In addition, if the homes of patients are warm and comfortable thanks to energy efficient improvements, people can be released more quickly from hospital, freeing up hospital beds and resources.