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Heat pumps and insulation ‘will end need for Russian gas faster than new North Sea drilling’

Equivalent energy demand could be ‘wiped out by 2027’ through greater efficiency, analysis finds

Harry Cockburn Environment Correspondent • Wednesday 09 March 2022 22:28 GMT

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Gas pipes for the Nord Stream 2 project which has been halted by Germany following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine (AFP via Getty)

Accelerating efforts to insulate Britain’s housing stock and replace **gas boilers** with air-source **heat pumps** will sever links with Russian gas much faster than expanding



drilling for **fossil fuels** in the **North Sea**, a new analysis has found.

According to the Energy & Climate Intelligence Unit (ECIU), the UK currently meets around 4 per cent of its gas demand from **Russia** which equates to £6m a day under recent wholesale prices.

But their analysis showed that the equivalent energy demand could be wiped out in just five years – as early as 2027 – through better **insulation** and installation of electric heat pumps, which they said would help protect 6.5 million homes from volatile gas prices.

Gas prices paid for by British people are set by international markets, and the only way to be certain that household costs go down is by using less gas.

However, North Sea fields proposed earlier this year wouldn't cut costs for customers and wouldn't come fully online until 2028, the ECIU said, while Greenpeace has said pursuing new licences for further new drilling have an average time of 28 years to start production.

The analysis found that heat pumps will be on average £260 a year cheaper to operate than gas boilers from April 2022, as gas prices soar, and the government's new Boiler Upgrade Scheme which also kicks off in April will provide £5,000 to households wanting to switch to a heat pump.

All types of homes in the UK are suited to the installation of heat pumps, while an estimated 9 million homes have good levels of thermal efficiency such that they could have a heat pump fitted easily.

The research comes after Boris Johnson indicated the government was considering new North Sea drilling, with reports that up to six new sites could apply for licences.

Andrea Leadsom, the former secretary for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, also suggested expanding drilling remained among the options being considered by the government.

She said: "Short term energy measures like better, warmer homes, investing in heat pumps, and increasing our use of offshore wind and the capacity of the North Sea oil basin can help the current energy situation that we are experiencing. I am confident

that these, and other options will be on the table as the government seeks to strengthen our energy security.

“It’s clear that Putin cannot be allowed to continue to wield the weapon of gas prices over us.”

Dr Simon Cran-McGreehin, Head of Analysis at the ECIU said: “The net zero path leads us to common sense home insulation and clean, renewable, homegrown energy that enables us to cut dependence on other countries like Russia for gas and oil.

“It’s a permanent solution and the UK needs to embrace it with greater urgency if we want to be truly energy secure.”

Dr Jan Rosenow of the Regulatory Assistance Project, which aims to accelerate the transition to a low-carbon economy said: “A massive scaling up of energy efficiency and heat pumps are the obvious response to sky high gas prices and the dependency on gas.

“The government’s targets are ambitious but not ambitious enough. We could go faster and further as the Committee on Climate Change have shown time and time again, and get ourselves off Russian gas well before 2027.”

The research follows a report from the Climate Change Committee which warns that The UK’s Heat and Buildings Strategy as set out by the government is “not yet comprehensive or complete, and significant delivery risks remain”.

Rosie Rogers, head of energy at Greenpeace UK, said: “Until our gas-guzzling homes kick their fossil fuel habits, the UK will continue to waste money on expensive gas imports. Recent weeks have shown just how untenable that is and just how important it is that we change it.

The government must view fixing our cold, draughty homes as the frontline of our attempts to get off gas and boost our energy security. Plugging the gaps highlighted by the government advisers with extra support, particularly for home insulation and heat pumps, are what this moment needs. The Spring Statement offers the Chancellor the opportunity to answer the call and roll out an Emergency Energy Package to get our country off gas as soon as possible.”

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