

EST Low Carbon Energy Choices

Consumer Guidance

Overview

With the rising interest in the low carbon /sustainable futures agenda and the increased focus on making smart energy choices it can sometimes feel like you have no choice but to embrace low energy solutions. It is with this in mind many people are turning to carbon footprint calculators and energy efficiency tools to give them recommendations about how to decrease their energy use at home and while out and about.

Disabled people often have lower incomes and are more likely to be living in social or rented housing. It can be difficult to know where to start with low energy choices. Many things like solar panels and heat pumps are large and often unrealistic recommendations for disabled people.

There is an increased pressure from government and other organisations using ‘nudge theory’ campaigns to embrace the low carbon agenda which can feel overwhelming and daunting.

This advice aims to contextualise the position of disabled consumers within the Low Carbon agenda and give some tips about how to best navigate this space if you are a disabled person looking to make some energy efficiency changes.

Research Findings

This guidance draws on findings from a research project chosen by the RiDC consumer panel and conducted by RiDC in association with the Energy Savings Trust which explored the accessibility of low carbon energy choices.

We conducted three focus groups exploring the **Inclusivity** of carbon footprint tracker information and how **Meaningful** and **Actionable** the results were.

We came to the following conclusions:

1. Information was not inclusive and accessible
2. Language was not contextually meaningful to disabled people
3. Answers were not relevant to personal circumstances
4. Recommendations were not realistically actionable

Advice/ Suggestions

Our research reflects that low carbon/ sustainable futures media campaigns do not always have disabled people in mind. Although change may be coming the current state of the energy efficiency market can be problematic for those with specific needs.

Manage your expectations.

When using tools to help engage and inform people, be aware that the questions and recommendations are often not likely to represent your personal circumstances. When using a tracker or other energy efficiency tool, be cautious and answer as close to the truth as you can. Recommendations are unlikely to have the specificity and individualisation that is needed when making decisions about home energy use.

Give yourself credit.

Many disabled people are already doing a lot to lessen their carbon footprint and reduce their energy use. When thinking about and using energy efficiency tools make sure to give yourself credit for everything you already do.

Trackers will not reward the things that are already being done but will simply suggest ways to cut energy use further.

The low-carbon agenda comes with a lot of emotive language, and this can leave disabled people feeling guilty or judged for not being able to make the changes which are recommended to them. You are doing the best you can and know that anything you are already doing is a step in the right direction.

Some things are not a choice.

Many disabled people have access needs which limit their ability to cut their energy use in certain areas. Current trackers and energy efficiency tools do not consider the things which are essential for some people's health and wellbeing.

If your car can't be changed to electric because of the access requirements or if you have to do the washing on a higher heat because of health concerns that is okay! Not everything is a choice when it comes to energy use.

Put your health first.

Some suggestions such as turning down the heating or turning off plugs at the wall, can pose a threat to health and safety for people with certain impairments. Put yourself and your health first, if an energy saving solution makes you feel unwell or unsafe don't do it.

If it is a matter of cost and you are concerned that if you don't make these changes and you will struggle financially, please follow the money helper links at the end of this advice.

Change will come, stay engaged and don't give up.

Our final piece of advice is to stick with it. It can be frustrating and exhausting having to constantly be confronted with advice and services which do not consider your individual needs, but don't lose hope. We are hoping that this and other research which we are currently undertaking will begin to create a more inclusive perspective taken with the low-carbon/ sustainable futures agenda.

Useful links/ Tools

Energy Efficiency Tips and Tools

WWF Carbon Footprint Tracker

<https://footprint.wwf.org.uk/>

Rochdale Council- Useful Tips to Reduce your Energy Use

<https://www.rochdale.gov.uk/climate-change/useful-tips-reduce-carbon-footprint/3>

Gov.uk- Energy Efficiency: What you need to know

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/energy-efficiency-what-you-need-to-know>

Financial and Energy Advice/ Support

Scope- Disability Energy Support

<https://www.scope.org.uk/disability-energy-support/>

Money Helper- Help with the Cost of Living

<https://www.moneyhelper.org.uk/en/money-troubles/cost-of-living>

Citizen's Advice Bureau- Grants and Benefits to help you pay your energy bills

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/energy/energy-supply/get-help-paying-your-bills/grants-and-benefits-to-help-you-pay-your-energy-bills/>