

WPD partners with gas supply company on hybrid heating project



A unique collaboration between electricity and gas network operators Western Power Distribution (WPD) and Wales & West Utilities has highlighted the viability of hybrid heating as a way of saving customers money and helping the U.K. reach its carbon reduction targets.

The results of the Freedom Project were launched at a reception at the Houses of Parliament on Oct. 9 to an audience of Parliament members, civil servants and industry experts.

Funded through U.K. regulator Ofgem's Network Innovation Allowance, the Freedom Project was designed to understand the potential role of installing and using hybrid gas-electric systems. It was delivered by PassivSystems, supported by Imperial College, Delta-ee and City University.

Heating systems that combined gas boilers with air source heating pumps and featured smart switching between the gas and electric networks were installed in 75 homes in Bridgend.

"Although plans for decarbonizing transport are taking shape, the pathway for decarbonizing heat is less certain," said WPD's Network Strategy and Innovation Manager Nigel Turvey "WPD is proud to be at the forefront of addressing some of the key unanswered questions of the future energy system. Together with Wales & West Utilities, we have a history of delivering for our customers and we want to ensure that continues.

"Using the latest technologies such as hybrid heating will enable us to deliver a low carbon future at a lower cost to customers," Turvey said.

Wales & West Utilities Chief Executive Graham Edwards said the project is a breakthrough opportunity to decarbonize home heating in a way that has customers and their needs at its heart.

"It both maximizes the use of existing utility assets while not disrupting customers' homes," Edwards said. The really exciting thing is that the smart controls tested and developed as part of this project are ready to go, meaning that if we can increase the development and use of green gas and renewable power, we can make hybrids happen – increasing the pace of decarbonization."

Findings from the project include:

- Smart hybrid systems can deliver a transition to low carbon heat, offering a significant financial saving compared to a full electrification scenario.
- As the gas demand on the system is reduced by hybridization, the opportunity for green gas to further enhance carbon outcomes increases.
- Homes that use LPG can make significant savings on winter fuel bills without any requirement to improve the thermal efficiency of the building or replace any radiators.

“Hybrid systems provide the lowest cost route to decarbonizing Britain’s homes,” said PassivSystems’ Chief Executive and Founder Colin Calder. “They also provide a growth opportunity for UK businesses.”

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