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Companies still unaware of new energy efficiency rules

Regulations come into force today

Scheme will name, shame and penalise

By Fiona Harvey, Environment Correspondent

Thousands of businesses are still unaware of new regulations coming into force today that will require them to monitor and report their energy use.

The CRC energy efficiency scheme – formerly the carbon reduction commitment – is central to the government's efforts to cut greenhouse emissions from service-sector companies.

Several surveys of busi-

nesses have found that up to half of the companies covered are unaware of the regulations or unsure how to implement them.

Almost half of companies polled by Npower, the electricity supplier, said official advice on how to comply was inadequate. A survey commissioned by Solar Gard, an energy efficiency specialist, found slightly more than half of businesses unaware that the new rules applied to them.

Kanat Emiroglu, managing director of British Gas Business, said: "There is a degree of understandable confusion among many UK businesses and public-sector organisations about what the CRC energy effi-

ciency legislation will mean for them. Often there isn't one single individual within the business who is tasked with monitoring and adhering to the CRC."

Up to 30,000 businesses and public-sector organisations – including retailers, hotels, restaurants, hospitals and universities – will be covered by the scheme, which requires them to register with officials and disclose their energy use.

The companies covered will be those whose electricity is metered by the half-hour. They have six months from today to register.

Of these, the 5,000 heaviest users of energy will be placed in a league table, showing their carbon emis-

sions relative to their peers. Companies at the bottom of the table will be penalised, with the money recycled into rewards for the most energy-efficient.

The penalties mean less than the reputational damage of being exposed as inefficient, according to David Symons, director at WSP, an environmental consultancy. "We don't anticipate that costs will be a key driver in the early years of the scheme," he

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said. "The messages we are getting from a large number of organisations is that they do not want to be seen in the bottom quartile of the league table."

The British Retail Consortium (BRC) said its members were mostly ready for the regulations. But a problem remains unresolved: organisations in rented buildings might be dependent on their landlords to take energy efficiency measures.

"An adequate solution hasn't been found to ensure that the costs and benefits of achieving energy efficiencies are shared fairly between landlords and their retail tenants," said Stephen Robertson, direc-

tor-general of the BRC. The scheme as currently set up is likely to save less than 1 per cent of Britain's greenhouse gas emissions by 2020.

Several business groups said it was important for the next government to continue with the regulations, or risk confusing companies further. Tony Grayling, head of climate change at the Environment Agency, which is charged with enforcing the rules, said the scheme would not impose costs on businesses. "In most cases, the savings on energy bills will outweigh the costs of the energy-saving measures," he said.

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