

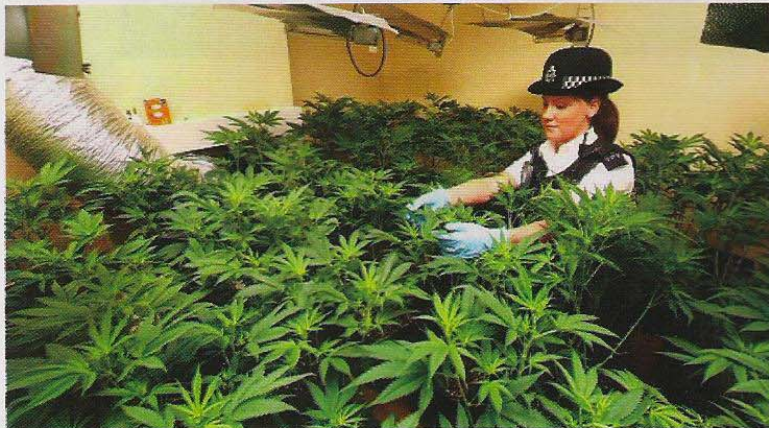
Hand in hand with a crackdown

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A major clampdown on energy theft could save consumers millions of pounds. But why not combine this with a national energy efficiency campaign, asks Keith Wyatt

In July, Ofgem announced proposals to clamp down on energy theft. These proposals can be considered a welcome and much-needed measure. According to the energy regulator there are 25,000 cases of energy theft a year. The proposals outline a national theft-risk assessment service to help suppliers target premises where there are strong suspicions that electricity is being stolen, most commonly through tampering with meters.

Ofgem should be applauded for its serious stance against energy theft. Up to a third of the volume of electricity stolen each year is used to power cannabis farms. Not only is energy theft illegal, but it is also added to the costs of paying consumers. Ofgem says energy theft costs paying electricity customers the equivalent of £7 each a year and when combined this equates to annual costs of £200m. Tackling energy theft would undoubtedly advance the agenda of a fairer market for the paying consumer. Nevertheless, the savings on consumer electricity bills would be even greater if the focus on energy theft worked in parallel with a nationwide energy efficiency programme.



Cannabis farms account for up to a third of the power stolen every year

The UK can significantly reduce its energy costs by simply reducing the amount of energy used. The Climate Minister himself recently acknowledged, "The cheapest form of energy is the energy that you don't use."

However, the media, business and public all continue to associate energy efficiency projects with compromise; whether that is light levels, light quality or performance.

Counteracting these misguided beliefs can only be addressed by implementing a combination of better case studies and more detailed information relating to the rewards of better efficiency and how this can be achieved.

Across the UK innovative companies are developing products designed to

improve energy efficiency. These range from sophisticated monitoring devices that provide a detailed breakdown of usage, to products like low-energy lights able to cut bills by 80 per cent and motor controllers which monitor loads 100 times a second to calculate the exact amount of power required at each precise moment. There are some common areas where energy is often wasted, and where the biggest savings are possible. For example, on average, 25 per cent of an organisation's electricity costs come from lighting. And yet, energy efficient lighting typically saves in excess of 70 per cent of electricity costs with the added benefit of being a very low maintenance solution.

Creating a working culture around electricity saving initiatives is always

a good starting point for businesses looking to improve energy efficiency. Regular staff meetings can help employees at all levels engage with the issue. Light switches should be clearly labelled to help workers select only those lights they need for the work being carried out. In addition, by ensuring timers are set to match trading hours you will experience immediate benefits to lighting costs.

Meanwhile, occupancy sensors are ideal for a warehouse where cleaning or security staff work late. For those looking to go a step further and invest in energy saving projects, engaging an expert to perform an audit to assess usage and where power is being wasted is essential. This will make it easier to identify the best technologies to invest in, and ultimately make the whole exercise more successful.

With Ofgem announcing the real risk of power cuts from the middle of the decade onwards, there has never been a greater time to address the issues of energy scarcity and its impact on cost to the consumer. Ofgem should be applauded for increasing public awareness on energy theft. Nevertheless, this issue should be acknowledged as part of a wider energy efficiency drive if the public isn't to continue footing the bill for energy mismanagement.