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Are you one of the Missing Millions? 254,000 households in Wales are missing out on energy savings

New research published today by the Home Heat Helpline has revealed that 254,000 households in Wales are missing out on big savings on their energy bills. By taking advantage of the free insulation on offer, families could slash more than £250 from their energy bills.

The Home Heat Helpline is urging people who think they may be one of the missing millions to call the free helpline on 0800 33 66 99 to get help and advice on keeping warm through the winter months.

Thousands of households in Wales could save around £150 a year on their heating bills by insulating their lofts and another £115 a year with cavity wall insulation. Of the top ten communities in Great Britain with the highest concentration of eligible households, five are located in Wales – Blaenau Gwent, Merthyr Tydfil, Neath/Port Talbot, Caerphilly and Rhondda, Cynon, Taff. Overall, 20% of households in Wales could benefit from free insulation grants compared to 14% across Great Britain as a whole.

Christine McGourty, the Home Heat Helpline spokesperson says, "There are free grants for insulation that could provide a lifeline for many people as it gets colder through the winter months. Make sure you're not one of the people missing out."

The Missing Millions research, carried out by independent think tank the New Policy Institute (NPI), highlights low income households claiming either out-of-work or disability benefits, working tax credit or pension credit, who could benefit from the insulation grants.

"This research shows the huge scale of unclaimed help that's out there on offer from energy suppliers," says Christine McGourty. "We have trained advisers who can help you get grants for insulation, special reduced tariffs as well as advice and support on how to keep warm and save money on your bills."

The top ten local authorities in Wales with the highest numbers of eligible households are:

Rhondda, Cynon, Taff – 23,900 vulnerable households (23% of all local households)
Cardiff – 23,300 vulnerable households (17% of all local households)
Swansea – 20,300 vulnerable households (20% of all local households)
Caerphilly – 17,500 vulnerable households (24% of all local households)
Carmarthenshire – 16,200 vulnerable households (21% of all local households)
Neath/Port Talbot – 15,100 vulnerable households (24% of all local households)
Bridgend – 12,500 vulnerable households (22% of all local households)
Newport – 11,800 vulnerable households (21% of all local households)
Wrexham – 10,500 vulnerable households (18% of all local households)
Flintshire – 10,500 vulnerable households (17% of all local households)

Anyone who is concerned about their fuel costs or those of a relative, neighbour or friend, should call the Home Heat Helpline free on 0800 33 66 99 to see if they are one of the Missing Millions.

Having reported an increase in fuel poverty, Tony Herbert, utilities policy officer at Citizens Advice says it has never been more important for households to take advantage of the help available:

“With the recession continuing and fuel prices remaining at historically high levels, it is essential that people who are struggling with fuel bills take advantage of the help that is available before the cold weather kicks in. The Home Heat Helpline is free and contacting them could make all the difference in helping you to have a warmer winter.”

Coronation Street star Kym Marsh is also giving her support to the campaign based on her own experience as a single mum:

“I know what it’s like to be a single mum who is struggling to pay the bills. When every penny counts you need all the help you can get. But often you don’t know who to turn to. The Home Heat Helpline provides a really friendly, helpful service for people in need. Anyone who thinks they might be missing out on the help they are entitled to should give them a call.”

Maria Wardrobe, who will be launching the NEA’s Warm Homes campaign next week stresses the importance of keeping warm for those who are vulnerable because of their age or health. She adds:

“NEA is fully supportive of the Home Heat Helpline. It is a popular and easy-to-use service that gives people in or at risk of fuel poverty straightforward advice on energy efficiency and energy bills.”

Anyone aged over 70 can also apply for a free home insulation grant. This accounts for a further 60,000 Welsh households which are eligible purely because of their age, and a further 1.3 million across the whole of Great Britain. The grants are provided under the CERT (Carbon Emission Reduction Target) scheme, which provides cavity wall or loft insulation for poorly insulated homes.

People who call the Home Heat Helpline can request the free *Little Book of Energy* which gives advice on grants and extra help available as well as top tips for making your home more energy efficient and reducing your bills.

ENDS

Notes to editors

The NPI research pinpoints where the Missing Millions are located up and down the country, enabling the Home Heat Helpline to see precisely which communities are most likely to gain from the assistance on offer. Across Great Britain, 3.6 million households are eligible for grants. According to the research, the Top Ten communities most likely to benefit nationwide if they pick up the phone are:

Local authority	Households which could benefit	Percentage of total households
1. Blaenau Gwent	8,000	26%
2. Merthyr Tydfil	6,400	26%
3. Neath Port Talbot	15,100	24%
4. Caerphilly	17,500	24%
5. Knowsley	14,800	24%
6. Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	23,900	23%
7. Torbay	13,200	22%
8. Sandwell	26,200	22%
9. Liverpool	42,100	22%
10. Leicester	24,700	22%

A map showing where the Missing Millions are located across Wales can be downloaded at the following address:

<http://www.homeheathelpline.org.uk/store/assets/files/75/original/NPI-map-wales.jpg>

Maps of Great Britain and Scotland are available on request. Maps above use data from Ordnance Survey. To reproduce the maps royalty-free, please contact Pauline Hand at Ordnance Survey on 023 8079 2251, or pressoffice@ordnancesurvey.co.uk

A full copy of the NPI report is available on request.

The New Policy Institute (NPI) was commissioned by the Home Heat Helpline to estimate the number of vulnerable households who could benefit from free CERT home insulation grants.

About the Home Heat Helpline

The Home Heat Helpline (0800 33 66 99) is a free, not for profit phone line set up by Britain's energy companies to help customers who are struggling to pay their energy bills and keep warm. Customers can also access the service online by visiting www.homeheathelpline.org.uk

The Helpline is managed by the Energy Retail Association and paid for by contributions from Britain's major energy suppliers. The service is backed by a range of support organisations including Age Concern / Help the Aged; Citizens Advice; National Energy Action; Energy Saving Trust; Counsel and Care and Gingerbread.

The Helpline's trained advisers can provide eligible customers with access to one or more of the following services:

- Free home insulation grants
- Reduced or 'social' tariffs
- The Priority Service Register which provides extra services for people who are elderly or disabled including bills in large text or Braille, security passwords and an annual gas safety check
- Flexible payment options for customers in fuel debt
- Benefits entitlement checks

The Energy Retail Association set up a Safety Net procedure in 2004 to make sure that no vulnerable customer in Britain is knowingly disconnected from their electricity or gas supply at any time of year.

For more information and to request interviews with spokespeople, please call Helen Carnall, Emmaline Damerum, Sarah Jaconelli or Matthew Burchell at Blue Rubicon on 020 7260 2700.