

PROTECTING CONSUMERS AND PROMOTING RENEWABLES

Welcome to the Winter edition of the RECC Newsletter

Valued members, as the evenings draw in, I hope you enjoy reading our latest newsletter!

Our membership renewal period is in full swing. If you have not already renewed, we would like to encourage you to check your inboxes for information about renewing your RECC membership for 2019. You will be pleased to learn that there is a discount for those who renew early!

On page 2 you will find plenty of news related to the solar PV

sector, including the upcoming closure of the Feed-in Tariff Scheme, and the work RECC is doing to persuade the Government to retain the export tariff element.

You will also find further details about member benefits on offer on the last page. We are always looking for ideas on benefits we can offer you. If you have photos we can use on our website and in our literature, please do get in touch via info@recc.org.uk.

Boris Eremin, Editor

SOLAR PV FRAUDSTERS JAILED

RECC's Chief Executive and one of RECC's auditors were among a total of 150 witnesses to give evidence in a fraud trial in Liverpool Crown Court which ran for 4 months this summer. The men on trial ran Solar Energy Savings Ltd, a company offering consumers over-priced solar PV panels on the basis that the money they paid was insured so that they would "get their money back within 5 years". (See the diagram below.)

At the end of the trial, six men, who had tricked 1,500 victims on the basis of a scam costing £17 million, have been sentenced to a total of over 30 years in prison. The trial followed a four-year investigation by the Serious Fraud Office, building on earlier work by the Companies Investigation Branch, part of the Insolvency Service.

The men used deceitful sales techniques, lies and false guarantees of payback to persuade their victims to buy. However, in reality there was no insurance scheme. As a result victims, many of whom were elderly, retired and vulnerable people, lost £10,000 to £20,000 each.

The ringleaders, David Diaz and Ludovic Black, were caught in Cheshire during a routine police stop after 7 months on the run. They were sentenced to 7.5 and 6.5 years in prison respectively, with the others sentenced to 4.5 and 3.5 years.

RECC had consistently refused Solar Energy Savings membership despite the directors' repeated attempts to join.

You can find more information [here](#).



The fraudulent business model
Image courtesy of SFO

IN THIS ISSUE

- 1 Solar PV fraudsters jailed
- 2 RECC warns of widespread consumer detriment from closure of FIT scheme

RECC calls on Government to extend deemed export tariff element of FIT scheme

RECC launches consumer guide on demand side response
- 3 Record high for renewables

National bodies predict important role for renewables in meeting 2050 targets

Blenheim Palace goes green

Government consults on limiting biomass combustion in urban areas
- 4 Which? warns about mis-sold solar panel "add-ons"

Large-scale renewables would transform Sahara desert

Graphene could be used to make ultra-thin solar cells

Solar Ireland 18
- 5 Stand out from the crowd with an endorsement from the UK's leading consumer organisation - Which?

Professional indemnity insurance for smaller renewables installers

[Click here for the RECC Annual Report 2017](#)

RECC warns of widespread consumer detriment from closure of FIT Scheme

RECC has warned Government that widespread mis-selling is likely in the run-up to the 31 March 2019, the proposed date for closing the Feed-In Tariff Scheme to new applicants. RECC's views are based on experience of consumer detriment resulting from the major changes to the Scheme in March 2012 and April 2016. RECC has advocated that Government takes a range of measures which will mitigate the dangers for domestic consumers of mis-selling, shoddy workmanship and fraudulent MID registration that are bound to occur in the run-up to the deadline (see the next story for more details).

RECC provided the results of a survey of members carried out during August. 56% of respondents said that the closure of the Feed-In Tariff Scheme without a replacement would have a very negative impact on their business. You can find the full results of the survey [here](#).

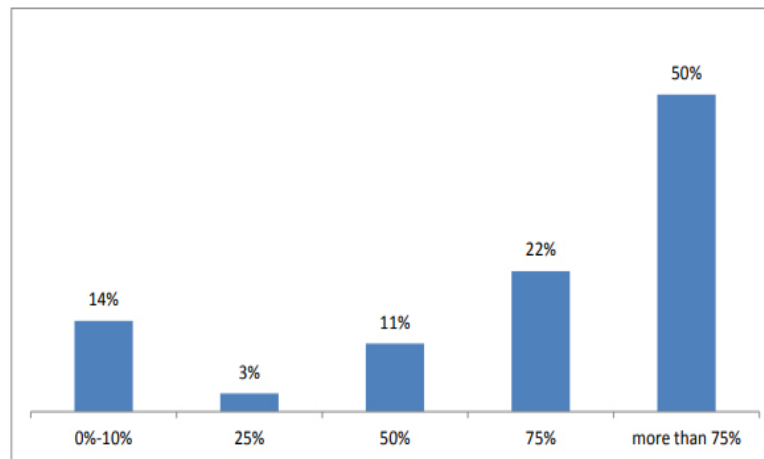
RECC was responding to the BEIS' detailed consultation on the practical arrangements for closing the Feed-In Tariff Scheme. You can find RECC's full response [here](#).

RECC CALLS ON GOVERNMENT TO EXTEND DEEMED EXPORT TARIFF ELEMENT OF FIT

RECC has called on Government to extend the deemed export tariff element of the FIT Scheme for small-scale generators. In the short term, this will allow for the equitable treatment of small-scale generators who would otherwise be unrewarded for exporting power to the grid.

We also argue that maintaining the deemed export tariff element of the Feed-In Tariff will allow for continued regulatory oversight of the sector, with products and installations compliant with MCS standards and Consumer Code requirements. This will be very important for consumers who otherwise risk being exposed to low quality installations and rogue traders. It will also allow for the details of installations to continue to be maintained in the Microgeneration Installer Database (MID) which is a very valuable resource for policy-makers and regulators alike.

RECC was responding to BEIS' earlier Call for Evidence on future support for small-scale renewable energy. You can find RECC's full response [here](#).



Percentage of domestic solar jobs RECC members think they could lose if the FIT scheme closes without an adequate replacement

RECC launches consumer guide on demand-side response

RECC has launched its consumer guide on demand-side response for domestic consumers. The guide explains what demand-side response means and how it works, and lists the sorts of kit in the home that might be part of it. These include smart meters, smart appliances, battery storage systems, electric vehicles that are charged at home, and solar PV panels, for example.

Typically an 'aggregator' will offer to manage domestic consumers' electricity generation and consumption, selling any net generation back to the electricity supply company. To maximise this, they will offer 'time of day' tariffs, either fixed or moveable, which incentivise electricity consumption at off-peak times, some even offering additional payments in return for consumers agreeing not to consume at 'critical' peak times.

The guide explains what consumers should think about, and lists 20 questions they should ask, before agreeing to a demand-side response contract. It also lists those offers currently available in the domestic consumer market.

RECC published its guide on 23 October to coincide with National Grid's October Power Responsive Flexibility Forum. The Association for Decentralised Energy presented its Code of Conduct for non-domestic consumers at the Forum, ahead of the official launch.

You can find the guide [here](#).

RECORD HIGH FOR RENEWABLES

Government figures for electricity usage show that renewables hit a high of 31.7% between April and June this year while coal dropped to a record low of 1.6% and figures for other fossil fuel-powered generation are also falling.

The shift comes largely as a result of investment in solar PV generation. The UK has spent 1,599 hours without coal powered electricity in the nine months up to October 2018, compared with only 233 hours in 2016 and 624 in 2017. Between April and June gas accounted for 42% of the electricity generated and nuclear energy for 21.7%.

Year on year renewable electricity generation has increased 3% to 24.3TWh and renewable electricity capacity has increased 10% to 42.2GW. More than half the capacity increase comes from offshore wind.

You can find more information [here](#).

NATIONAL BODIES PREDICT IMPORTANT ROLE FOR RENEWABLES IN MEETING 2050 TARGETS

Renewables could play an important role in the energy mix of the future without increasing costs. This is the conclusion of a recent analysis produced for the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) by Aurora Energy Research.

Their modelling showed that the percentage of renewables in the mix did not affect costs significantly although the lowest cost was achieved when 70-80% of electricity was generated by renewables. Climate targets and electricity demand up to 2050 could thus be met without adding to system costs

NIC believes that it is becoming ever more likely that the solution to our energy trilemma – ensuring security of supply, affordability, and sustainability – is to have a highly renewable energy system with some nuclear. More work needs to be done on developing new storage technologies to deal with problems caused by the variability of the weather and ways of coping with the radioactive waste produced by nuclear energy generation.

The National Grid's latest edition of its Future Energy Scenarios also shows for the first time that two of its scenarios met climate targets for 2050. In both of these renewables provided over 70% of electricity generation.

A copy of the report can be found [here](#).

To find out more about the benefits of becoming a Trust Mark registered business with RECC please see [here](#).



Blenheim Palace goes green

Blenheim Palace has signed a new deal with Good Energy to provide all its electricity from renewable sources. The company will not only supply the electricity to the Palace's main buildings, Park Farm and offices but also its Pleasure Gardens, on-site bottling plant and the nearby Windrush Industrial Estate where the businesses will also become more sustainable.

The Palace, which is a UNESCO World Heritage site, has announced that it intends to become a net generator of green energy within 10 years. It has already invested extensively in solar PV, biomass boilers and a hydroelectric tube.

Randall Bowen, Sales and Commercial Director at Good Energy said: "Switching to a truly clean energy supplier is the natural choice for the business and the single most important thing the public can do to tackle climate change".

You can find more information [here](#).



Blenheim Palace. Photo © [Francois Thomas](#) (cc-by-sa/2.0)

Government consults on limiting biomass combustion in urban areas

Government is proposing that biomass combustion installations should no longer be eligible for RHI support if they are located in urban areas that are on the gas grid. This would apply to new applications from the time amending regulations come into force, but would not apply to existing RHI installations.

These proposed changes would apply to domestic and non-domestic biomass installations of all sizes, and also to biomass combined heat and power (CHP) installations. A new biomass installation would not be permitted in the RHI at any site which is urban and has access to the gas network.

Responses to the consultation should be submitted to the RHI team at BEIS by close of play on 27 November, if possible using the Government's e-Consultation CitizenSpace platform.

You can find the consultation [here](#).

WHICH? WARNS ABOUT MIS-SOLD SOLAR PANEL "ADD-ONS"

A recent Which? report found that 75% of solar panel owners have been approached by companies trying to sell them "add-on" products or services they had not asked for and do not need. The report is based on an online survey of over 2,000 Which? members with solar panels carried out in May this year.

One in three had been offered a solar panel service in the past two years. These services could include panel cleaning, electrical testing, inspection and checking performance. Quotes could be as high as £200 for a one-off service and £495 for an annual contract including breakdown repair and insurance against damage and theft.

Service arrangements are not usually necessary since solar panels do not need much maintenance. Rain keeps them clean and the Energy Saving Trust advises that, providing owners keep an eye on their systems, they should spot if anything goes wrong.

One in five Which? members had been offered a voltage

optimiser. Companies claimed that they would reduce electricity consumption and cut bills. Some gave estimates of 20% savings. However, we have found no objective evidence for these claims. One study showed that voltage optimisers have different impacts in different homes and can sometimes even increase electricity usage.

One in five Which? members were approached by a company offering to supply them with a replacement inverter and three in five were told that a new inverter would increase their system's performance. If an inverter is still working there is no need to replace it. Some newer models are more efficient than the older ones, but may need replacing after 10 years.

You can find RECC's guidance on "add-ons" [here](#).

You can read the Which? report [here](#).

Large-scale renewables would transform Sahara desert

A study has shown that huge numbers of wind turbines and solar PV panels could double the amount of rainfall, aiding the growth of green vegetation and lowering temperatures.

Such a move could generate more than four times the amount of energy used around the world each year. It would also enable more farmers and their livestock to thrive in the desert.

Scientists have known for a while that installing wind turbines and solar panels would have an impact on temperatures, but they had not realised the major impact there would be on

vegetation which increases by about 20%. The increase in rainfall was particularly marked in the semi-arid region of the Sahel where it went up by 20mm to 500mm a year.

Dr Yan Li, the leading scientist on the University of Illinois study, believes that such installations could significantly decrease greenhouse gases and transform energy sources so that fresh water, food and life on our planet become more sustainable.

You can find more information [here](#).

Graphene could be used to make ultra-thin solar cells

Scientists at the University of Kansas have discovered a way of linking a layer of graphene with two other atomic layers which could lead to the development of ultrathin and flexible high-efficiency solar cells converting energy from sunlight to electricity.

Graphene, which was discovered by scientists at Manchester University in 2004, is a single layer of carbon atoms and has properties that could be ideal for a wide range of applications. But it has a major drawback – its electrons stay mobile for only one picosecond (one-millionth of one millionth of a second). This makes it impossible to gather together the large number of so-called "excited electrons" needed to stay mobile long enough to contribute to electricity.

You can find more information [here](#).

Solar Ireland 18

Solar Ireland 18 Takes place 27-28 November 2018, Croke Park Dublin.

The Irish Solar Energy Association's (ISEA) annual conference plays host to key stakeholders in the Irish and international Solar industry. The agenda for the show includes sessions on: project development, utility scale solar, rooftop solar, policy support and implementation, planning, community and solar, farming and solar, grid connection, financing systems, and more.

The show expects many speakers, key notes, panel sessions, and exhibitors.

You can find more information on how to book [here](#).

When you're endorsed by Which? you know it means something...and Which? Trusted Traders is no different!

Which? Trusted Traders fills an important gap in the market. A completely free-to-use service for all consumers, Which? Trusted Traders exists to help people find local traders they can depend on across a huge range of sectors. At the same time, it gives trustworthy traders the recognition they deserve. While there are already a number of trader schemes in the marketplace, none can provide what Which? Trusted Traders provides – an endorsement from the UK's leading independent consumer organisation.

Want to become a Which? Trusted Traders Endorsed business?

RECC is in partnership with Which? Trusted Traders and is excited to bring RECC members a new offer for 2019! As a RECC member, you can get 50% a discount on your first 6 months of being a Which? Trusted Trader.

Trading standards professionals carefully assess every Which? Trusted Traders applicant to ensure they meet their high standards. In other words, endorsement is not something they give to everyone. But, if your assessment is successful, your business can start reaping the many rewards, including:

- Displaying the Which? Trusted Traders endorsement icon alongside your own logo
- Having your business profile featured on the Which? Trusted Traders website
- Having a dedicated account manager helping you make the most of your endorsement

To find out more, please call RECC on 0207 981 0850 to get your unique Which? Trusted Traders discount code!



Poppy Hynam from Which? Trusted Traders with Virginia Graham and Olivia Fursstedonn from RECC



Professional indemnity insurance for smaller renewables installers

Specifically designed for SMEs and micro-businesses working in the renewables sector, RECC has negotiated favourable rates for combined public liability, employer's liability and professional indemnity insurance. The policies are arranged by JELF and underwritten by Breeze Underwriting UK.

Protect your reputation

As a professional renewable energy installer, you work in a highly skilled, detail-oriented industry and are expected to provide quality work that is free of errors. And yet, despite your expertise, the reality is that not all projects are error-free and mistakes are bound to occur. Even the smallest error can have serious consequences. If a consumer believes damages are due to a mistake on your part, they can sue your company. A professional indemnity policy will cover these costs in the event of such a claim, which may otherwise financially cripple your business.

What to look for in a policy

Though you may specialise in certain areas, you are likely to handle a variety of projects and services and you'll want your policy to reflect that. Depending on your needs, you may want to consider these components:

- pollution liability that covers sudden, accidental and gradual pollution;
- specific cover for breach of a client contract;
- full civil liability cover (not just negligence);
- specific cover for breach of intellectual property rights;
- reimbursement of costs incurred to help reduce or avoid a claim;
- punitive and exemplary damages cover; and
- virus and hacking liability cover.

What is not covered

The following items are generally excluded from a professional indemnity policy: unfair trade practices (you hire a competitor's employee and take the competitor's clients), failure to pay a fee or invoice and wilful or dishonest acts.

For more information, contact Jelf on 01905 892367 or RECC@Jelf.com to learn more about professional indemnity and other insurance that you require as a RECC member.