

BEFORE YOU SWITCH THE HEATING ON, CHECK YOU ARE ON THE RIGHT TARIFF SAYS SUPERSWITCHER.CO.UK

Submitted by: Compass Rose Marketing & PR

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With the 'Summer' almost over, many householders who are already under pressure from the recession are fearing a new threat – fuel poverty*. SuperSwitcher.co.uk (<http://www.superswitcher.co.uk>) (www.superswitcher.co.uk) offers help on its website with advice for tackling high fuel bills, and with its free and easy to use account management tool, which helps consumers to regularly compare and switch gas and electricity tariffs (<http://www.superswitcher.co.uk>) – at the press of a button.

As recently reported by energy industry regulator Ofgem, Britain's Big Six energy suppliers spent £157 million on voluntary social programmes in 2008-09, a near three-fold increase compared with 2007-08 (£57 million). Most was spent on social and other discounted tariffs for vulnerable and fuel poor customers.

Fred Rojahn, a former senior manager at E.ON UK and now Managing Director of SuperSwitcher, states "it is laudable that the major energy suppliers support vulnerable customers and the fuel poor with social programmes, especially during the recession; however, it is the suppliers' high energy prices that made this spending necessary in the first place. Moreover, we need to recognise that these programmes are financed by the energy bills paid by the rest of the population."

Rojahn continues "just under 1 million customers are expected to come off capped price energy tariffs between July 2009 and December 2009. If these customers don't do anything, their supplier will typically move them on to a standard tariff, which will be much more expensive than cheaper online tariffs. Therefore, consumers should keep an eye out for better deals."

Using SuperSwitcher, those on capped price tariffs can simply set themselves a reminder for the expiration date of their current contract, to make sure they don't end up paying over the odds.

*Fuel poverty is when in order to heat its home a household needs to spend more than 10% of its income on total fuel use. This means even otherwise affluent households can suddenly find themselves fuel-poor. Not for nothing, fuel poverty increased sharply in the UK in 2008, due to almost unprecedented increases in energy bills.

2008 saw price increases of 45% by energy companies and in early 2009 the major suppliers declared they were to drop their prices, but only a 10% reduction has been seen. As a result, research from the charity National Energy Action (NEA) showed that as of March 2009 over 5 million households across the UK were living in fuel poverty, a sharp increase from historic levels. The situation is particularly threatening for older consumers, with charity Help the Aged estimating that one in four UK pensioners suffers from fuel poverty already.

Friedrich Rojahn adds "Further, small price decreases are now trickling in over the course of the summer, creating an opportunity for households to cut their energy bills, and hopefully signaling the start of a price war later in the year. To take advantage of this, however, consumers need to regularly monitor their tariff – and not be swayed by advertising that states one supplier is better than another. This of course is true – but for specific sized homes, in specific locations, with specific usage. Consumers should therefore always check with a credible source, such as an online comparison

service, before they switch energy supplier.” Consumers should visit SuperSwitcher (www.superswitcher.com/portal/uk) now to compare deals in their area.

About SuperSwitcher

SuperSwitcher.co.uk is a free online account management tool that helps consumers save hundreds of pounds each year by making it easier than ever before to compare electricity and gas suppliers, and to switch to a cheaper tariff. The account management tool requires minimal data to register and enables consumers to compare all UK gas and electricity tariffs with the push of a single button.

After registration, SuperSwitcher can be used through its website, and is also available as a Facebook application. Users can switch utility providers and benefit by logging in to either site.

SuperSwitcher’s tariff database is accredited by Consumer Focus / Energywatch, ensuring that consumers can always find the best deals on the site.

The company is privately owned and funded and not tied to any energy supplier.

For more information, please visit www.superswitcher.co.uk and for editorial enquiries please contact:

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Notes to editors:

The UK Government’s preferred definition of household income includes income from housing-related benefits in the calculation of household income. Other estimates of the extent of fuel poverty exclude benefits from household income. The charity National Energy Action regards both these definitions as unacceptable and believes that disposable income (after the deduction of housing costs) should be used in the definition of fuel poverty.

The UK has two main programmes that are designed to address fuel poverty by improving energy efficiency. These are the WarmFront programme, offering a package of measures at no cost to private sector residents meeting certain, mainly income-related, requirements, and the Carbon Emissions Reduction Target (CERT, formerly the Energy Efficiency Commitment), which requires licensed energy supplier to meet certain targets in improving domestic energy efficiency, with at least 40% of such savings to come from defined target groups who are more likely to suffer from fuel poverty. The Government imposes certain standards on public sector landlords to help them lift their tenants out of fuel poverty.

The Government also claims that the Winter Fuel Payment helps to mitigate fuel poverty, but as this is paid to all households with an occupant over 60, this measure can be considered a generally available benefit and not targeted on the fuel poor.

WarmFront <http://www.warmfront.co.uk/>

The Government's WarmFront Scheme offers grants for vulnerable private sector households to install energy efficiency measures, including central heating and insulation. The scheme provides a package of insulation and heating improvements up to the value of £3,500 (or £6,000 where oil, low carbon or renewable technologies are recommended). It is a Government-funded initiative and the scheme is managed by eaga. Consumers can get additional information from the Scheme's website, or via enquiry@eaga.com and freephone 0800 316 2805

Home Heat Helpline <http://www.homeheathelpline.org.uk/>

Households that are under severe pressure from energy bills should contact the Home Heat Helpline –) at 0800 33 66 99, which can deliver for these vulnerable groups:

- Advice on social tariffs – typically a 20 per cent saving
- Access to the Priority Service Register, with free annual gas appliance safety checks, passwords for official gas and electricity-related callers
- Third party, Braille, large print and talking billing
- Grants for free home insulation regardless of who owns the property and no means testing for the over 70s.
- Absolute right for them to receive free cavity wall and loft insulation or free top-ups to modern standards.
- Same help to all households in receipt of attendance allowance, disability living allowance or employment and support allowance (incapacity benefit) single parent allowance or households with young children with an annual income of less than £14,600.
- Flexible payment options for customers in fuel debt
- A disconnection safety net, ensuring no vulnerable customer will be knowingly disconnected

The Home Heat Helpline also recognises that those most in need of help are often those least able to access it so the helpline now accepts third party applications.

Help the Aged <http://www.helptheaged.org.uk/en-gb>

The Government estimates that about half of the UK's fuel-poor households contain older people. Help the Aged estimates that about one in four pensioners in the UK is experiencing fuel poverty.

Low income is a defining factor of fuel poverty, leaving some older people on fixed incomes unable to afford to heat their home or faced with the stark choice of either paying for heating or buying food. In addition, a home that is not energy-efficient is more expensive to heat. This means that even those with higher incomes can still suffer from fuel poverty because a larger percentage of their income is spent on heating their home to a sufficient level. The recent steep price rises for gas and electricity have put the issue of fuel poverty in the media spotlight as households struggle to pay their energy bills.

There is a definite link between increasing energy prices and increases in fuel poverty. In 2003, the then Department for Trade and Industry (DTI) estimated that for every 1 per cent rise in energy prices, an extra 40,000 households become fuel poor (DTI (2003), A ready reckoner looking at the effect on fuel poverty of various price and income changes. See www.berr.gov.uk/files/file16807.pdf)

Source: Policy Statement 2008:

http://policy.helptheaged.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/264B0773-9DCF-48A1-8E37-654DEFE02643/0/fuel_poverty_statement_2008.p

Every winter between 20,000 and 50,000 older people die from cold-related illnesses.

Source: http://policy.helptheaged.org.uk/_policy/Poverty/FuelPoverty/_default.htm

National Energy Action <http://www.nea.org.uk/>

The Government's annual progress reports showed considerable progress towards meeting fuel poverty targets, demonstrated in the rapidly falling incidence of fuel poverty between 2000 and 2003. However, since 2004, progress has stalled and then reversed to the extent that the current incidence of fuel poverty exceeds that of a decade ago.

The rise in fuel prices over recent years has reversed much of the progress that has been made towards meeting fuel poverty targets. To mitigate the impact of high energy prices, and in recognition of the fact that the era of comparatively low prices may never return, further action is needed to address the three key essential requirements for affordable warmth: improved heating and insulation standards, adequate levels of household income and support with energy costs for vulnerable households.

The 2008 report presents the stark reality that fuel poverty in England has risen by 1 million households between 2005 and 2006 including an additional 700,000 vulnerable households. This major reversal is caused by the dramatic increases in domestic gas and electricity prices.

Source: <http://www.nea.org.uk/assets/Uploads/The-Cost-of-Affordable-WarmthFINAL-VERSION2.pdf>

Various other useful graphs can be found at <http://www.nea.org.uk/progress-charts/>

