

Heat Pumps are not popular

The government is keen to promote heat pumps for others, yet the uptake by Ministers and senior officials is still low. I would be more impressed if those recommending them had personal experience of them first. The German government seeking to accelerate their adoption by proposing to end oil and gas boiler sales by the end of this year has suffered a blow to its ratings. The policy has acted as good stimulus for gas and oil boiler sales as people rush to renew before the deadline.

My electricity supplier tells me about heat pumps, presumably to encourage me. They say a heat pump costs between £5500 and £13000 with a government £5000 grant. They warn that I might need to put in bigger radiators and pipes which would be costly, and of course propose additional spending on insulation to allow for the lower temperatures you would otherwise get. They say the hot water would be 50-55 degrees not 60 to 65 degrees which they propose for a gas boiler. They suggest running costs would be lower than a gas boiler.

I made enquiries for one for my small London flat where I am not allowed a gas boiler. I was told they cannot supply one as I am not allowed to place a box or pipe on the outside of the building and am not on the ground floor to allow ground source heat. Flats present a major setback for the heat pump movement, as many are unable to adapt to them.

Some users who have tried heat pumps report low levels of heating in cold snaps. Some report large electricity bills as they try to get their water and rooms up to temperature against a background of much dearer energy tariffs for electricity than for gas. Some experience difficulties in getting the systems to work. Installation is more complex and entails more work to the house than simply changing gas boilers.

These products are a hard sell. They are dear. On windless days the heat pumps require a lot of fossil fuel to be burned in power stations to keep them working. I will wait to see how many Ministers and senior officials do buy them and listen to their experiences if they still want to recommend them.