

**REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF
ENERGY EFFICIENCY ADVICE FROM
ELECTRICITY AND GAS SUPPLIERS**

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Prepared for **OFGEM**

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CONTENTS

	Page No.
FOREWORD BY OFGEM	i
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & Summary Tables	ii-ix
INTRODUCTION	
Background	1
Purpose of the research	3
Research methods	3
Arrangement of the report	3
FINDINGS	
General Call Centres (GCCs)	4
How quickly General Call Centres respond to calls, and how they respond	5
How call handlers responded to customers' problems at General Call Centres	8
How call handlers at GCCs responded to supplementary questions	11
How our mystery shoppers rated the call handlers at General Call Centres	13
Conclusions on the performance of General Call Centres	17
Energy Efficiency Helplines	18
Successful call rates, speed of response and call lengths	19
How calls were handled	20
How call handlers greet callers to the Energy Efficiency Helplines	21
Responses to customers' queries – by the eight Scenarios	24
Responses to the customers' queries – by each company's Helpline	36
Energy efficiency measures recommended to callers	44
How Energy Efficiency Helplines responded to specific questions/requests	48
Details requested by call handlers	54
Customers' impressions of the Energy Efficiency Helplines	57
Printed information and advice promised and sent following telephone calls to Energy Efficiency Helplines	61
Questionnaires and Home Energy Reports	63
Likely take-up of measures advised	64
Likely take-up of grants etc..	64
Overall usefulness of advice	64
Whether companies monitor their Energy Efficiency Helplines	65
Conclusions on the performance of Energy Efficiency Helplines	69
APPENDICES	
Research Methodology	
The Mystery Shopping Questionnaire and Sampling Plan	
Self-completion Questionnaire sent to Assessors	
Acknowledgements	

FOREWORD BY OFGEM

This is the second Mystery Shopping Study which has been prepared for Ofgem by New Perspectives and Taylor Nelson Sofres Mystery Shopping. The purpose of the study was to gain a full picture of the quality of energy efficiency advice which customers receive from suppliers, and to see how this has changed since the first study conducted in 2002, and since Ofgem published its *Good Practice in the provision of energy efficiency advice* in February, 2003.

Under their licences, electricity and gas suppliers are obliged to provide domestic customers with advice on energy efficiency. Each supplier has to prepare and publish a Code of Practice setting out the services they will provide to customers in this area. Ofgem collects statistics from suppliers on the numbers and types of enquiries they receive from their customers. Details are published quarterly on Ofgem's website (www.ofgem.gov.uk).

The study was again done by using a panel of 'mystery shoppers' to make a series of telephone calls to suppliers' General Call Centres and Energy Efficiency Advice Helplines seeking advice on a range of problems. In almost all cases the callers were actual customers of the supplier concerned. The results presented in this document therefore provide a detailed, factually based, picture of what is happening on the ground.

The results indicate that, overall, there have been real improvements over the last eighteen months in the standards of advice given by suppliers' Energy Efficiency Advice Helplines. In particular, it is encouraging that those suppliers which performed poorly in the last survey have shown substantial improvements. Nevertheless, there is still room for further improvement and it remains of concern that many General Call Centres are failing to recognise where expert advice is needed.

Ofgem has written individually to each supplier included in this report to seek their comments on the findings, and proposals for ensuring improvements are made where these are needed. Ofgem supports the Energy Efficiency Partnership for Homes' Code of Practice on Energy Advice, and is encouraging suppliers to sign up to this to demonstrate their commitment to providing quality advice. We will report on progress in the Social Action Plan Annual Review to be published in March 2004. Any comments on this research should be sent by 20 February 2004 to:

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Ofgem is grateful to Robin Sadler and his team at New Perspectives, and the 'mystery shopping' panel at Taylor Nelson Sofres Mystery Shopping, for their painstaking work on designing and undertaking this research, and preparing this report on the results.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Objectives and Methods

1. This research was carried out for Ofgem by New Perspectives and Taylor Nelson Sofres (TNS) Mystery Shopping in September/October 2003, in order to explore the quality of energy efficiency advice given by major gas and electricity suppliers in Great Britain, to see how the standards of advice had changed since the first mystery shopping survey in January/February 2002, and to see whether *Good Practice* was now more widely followed.
2. The research consisted of a Mystery Shopping Survey, in which assessors from TNS Mystery Shopping made 48 telephone calls to the General Call Centres of suppliers and 159 calls to their Energy Efficiency Helplines. Almost all these assessors were real customers of the companies they called, and each asked for help dealing with one of eight scenarios: high bills, a cold home (and an elderly person in residence), help to save energy, finding energy saving appliances, grants for energy saving measures, how to insulate solid walls, how best to control water heating and a request for a home visit to advise on control of storage heaters.
3. The project was managed and reported on by New Perspectives, who designed the mystery shopping and telephone questionnaires, and carried out the analysis. The rest of this section summarises the main findings and conclusions, and is followed by Summary Charts which show how the major companies performed on a number of key criteria.

The Mystery Shopping Survey – General Call Centres of major suppliers

4. The first part of the Mystery Shopping Survey consisted of 48 calls to the General Call Centres of energy and gas suppliers, and was designed to check whether call handlers recognise the callers' need for energy efficiency advice, and refer them to the Energy Efficiency Helpline. The scenarios tested were: high bills, a cold home (with an elderly resident), and needing help to save energy.
5. From these 48 calls to General Call Centres we found that just over three quarters of the calls made by customers to General Call Centres are successfully connected at the first attempt (79%) whereas 87% of first calls got through in 2002. Some callers made several unsuccessful attempts, or simply gave up after waiting several minutes. A few had to wait unacceptably long times (e.g. over 5 minutes) to be connected to British Gas, npower and Powergen. But once callers do get through, they are usually dealt with in a polite and professional manner.
6. Over half (56%) of customers who call with the sorts of problems we tested now seem likely to be referred or transferred *immediately* to their supplier's Energy Efficiency Helpline – this is an improvement on 2002 when only 46% were. Some callers (17%) are instead given some sort of advice by the General Call Centre before being referred on to the helpline. Altogether therefore 73% of callers are finally referred to Energy Efficiency Helplines, compared to 71% who were referred in 2002.

7. Some companies' General Call Centres appear to be good at transferring or referring almost all these energy efficiency enquiries to the Energy Efficiency Helpline: EDF Energy and Scottish Power referred all our callers, and British Gas referred 88%. But some other companies are still rather poor at spotting customers who need specialist energy efficiency advice: npower and Scottish & Southern referred only 63% of callers, and Powergen referred only half.
8. Where General Call Centres give energy efficiency advice themselves (with or without later referring callers to the EEH) the advice is usually less comprehensive than that supplied by the Energy Efficiency Helplines. Few callers were asked about benefits or age, or told about grants, and none were told about Energy Efficiency Commitment (EEC) schemes. Few were advised on energy saving measures to install, although around half of the callers offered advice by General Call Centres were given verbal advice on controlling heating or hot water. A few were advised how to spread their payments, rather than how to reduce them.
9. Although some general call handlers claim to be trained in energy awareness, most mystery shoppers felt that the call handlers did not know a great deal about energy efficiency, although they did seem to know a little more than a year ago. Although their advice was found "quite easy" or "very easy to understand", most of our callers also felt this advice was not "very useful" – and less useful than many callers later found the advice from the Energy Efficiency Helplines.
10. Although slightly more customers with energy efficiency queries are now recognised and referred to helplines by General Call Centres, we conclude that there is still some room for improvement. Call handlers who try to provide adequate advice themselves are not as well-equipped as specialist advisers at the Energy Efficiency Helpline. We believe that there is a need for more training of General Call Centre staff to help them recognise when customers could benefit from "energy efficiency advice", even if they do not ask for this directly.

The Mystery Shopping Survey – Energy Efficiency Helplines of major suppliers

11. In 2003 we found that more first calls to Energy Efficiency Helplines got through (76%) than they had done in 2002 (60%) which is a significant improvement. But some customers made several unsuccessful calls before being connected, and one or two gave up after five unsuccessful calls. The two companies with the worst record for unsuccessful calls (and a poorer performance than in 2002) are Powergen and npower, where only half the initial calls got through. We conclude that there is still much room for improvement here.
12. Our most important finding is that there have been several significant improvements since 2002 in the provision of advice by Energy Efficiency Helplines. More callers are now being asked detailed questions by advisers or being sent a home energy audit questionnaire, so that the adviser can recommend the most appropriate measures and grant schemes and send a *Home Energy Report*. More callers are now being asked about benefits and age to help determine grant eligibility; more are now being given advice on measures to install and behavioural changes to save energy; more people are being told about grants (but strangely not about EEC schemes); and most callers are

now being provided with a general booklet of energy advice, and other relevant literature. In short, there are no longer any companies whose helplines appear to operate in the chaotic and haphazard ways which we encountered in the 2002 mystery shopping survey. This has to be good for customers.

13. But the scenarios which tend to attract the more comprehensive energy efficiency advice are those which are the most obvious pleas for energy efficiency help (cold homes, high bills, help me save energy, insulate solid walls, and information on grants). Requests for help to choose low energy appliances or to control hot water or storage heaters tend to attract less comprehensive advice. Yet all these scenarios were devised as possible “presenting problems” which might be raised by people more generally concerned about their energy consumption, and therefore needing fuller help. Some energy advisers need training to recognise these callers too as potentially in need of comprehensive help.
14. Although many more customers are now being given information on possible grants to help them take up some recommended energy efficiency measures, there has been no increase in the numbers of callers advised about EEC schemes. Only one in five callers is told about these (21%). We do not know the reason for this, but with the expansion of the EEC programme to some £150 million per annum, we would have expected more companies to make use of the opportunities presented by energy efficiency enquiries.
15. When our mystery shoppers asked supplementary questions of the energy advisers (e.g. on grants, measures advised, condensing boilers and CFLs etc.) they were usually (but not always) given some helpful and re-assuring information on costs, benefits and savings. But we found no improvement in energy advisers’ knowledge of grant and EEC schemes, nor in the likely costs or savings from other measures they had advised: this cannot inspire confidence in customers. Some energy advisers also knew too little about controlling heating, insulating walls, servicing boilers and blocking up chimneys, and they sometimes gave potentially dangerous advice. We conclude that some energy advisers still have a lot to learn, and that this should be a continuous process so that they keep abreast of the latest developments.
16. Even if some energy advisers don’t know everything about energy efficiency, they were rated as more knowledgeable about energy efficiency than they had been in 2002 (80 out of 100 compared to 67 before). And our mystery shoppers again rated most energy advisers as “professional” and “polite” in the way they handled the call – and more highly than they had last year. Most customers (90%) also rated the advice they received as “very easy” or “quite easy to understand”. All these are signs of improvements in the standards of service over the last 18 months.
17. Verbal energy advice (given on the telephone) is of course only part of the process of helping customers to be more energy efficient. Verbal advice ideally needs to be followed up with printed material explaining how households can be more energy efficient in their behaviour, and through measures they install, and one of the best forms of printed advice has been identified through other research as the Home Energy Report. We were therefore interested to see what publications were sent to customers, and whether these included an energy audit questionnaire and, later, a report. We found that Energy Efficiency Helplines are now making much more

extensive use of *Home Energy Reports* than they were in 2002, sending them to 42% of callers now, compared to just 11% in 2002. Companies have also become better at sending out a general booklet on energy efficiency: 79% of callers received one this year, compared to 62% in 2002. Most callers now receive most of the promised literature (a big change from the 2002 result) but there are still a few callers (15%) who receive nothing. This is an improvement on 2002, but there is room to tighten up on systems even more so that all callers receive their promised publications.

18. When we finally assessed the persuasiveness of these energy advice services by checking whether our mystery shoppers might install some of the recommended measures, we found that the advice provided this year was likely to encourage more of them to install measures (49%) than had been the case last year (41%). They also rated the advice more useful (74 out of 100) than they had in 2002 (66 out of 100). EDF Energy appears to give the most persuasive and most useful advice, while Powergen's advice is the least persuasive and useful of the large suppliers, with the smaller Atlantic a little way behind that. But all suppliers' advice is now rated as or more useful than it was in 2002, with some very significant improvements by the companies which performed poorly in 2002 – Scottish Power and Powergen.

FINDINGS SUMMARY TABLE: OVERALL PERFORMANCE OF GENERAL CALL CENTRES – 2003

MAJOR FUEL COMPANIES Good *** Adequate ** Poor *	British Gas	EDF Energy	npower	Powergen	Scottish & Southern	Scottish Power	Atlantic
First calls successful	*	*	**	*	**	**	*
Speed of Response	*	**	*	*	**	**	*
High proportion of callers referred to En. Effic. Helpline	**	***	*	*	*	***	*
TOTAL STARS (Max: 9)	4	6	4	3	5	7	3

SUMMARY TABLE: OVERALL PERFORMANCE OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES - 2003

MAJOR FUEL COs/GROUPS Good *** Adequate ** Poor *	British Gas	EDF Energy	npower	Powergen	Scottish & Southern	Scottish Power	Atlantic
CALL HANDLING							
First calls successful	**	***	*	*	**	**	***
Speed of Response	*	**	***	**	***	*	***
PROVIDING VERBAL ADVICE							
Asking about Home/Quest'aire	***	***	***	**	**	***	**
Asking about Benefits/Age	**	**	**	**	**	*	*
Advice on Measures to install	**	**	*	*	***	**	**
Advice on Grants/EEC	**	**	*	**	**	**	**
On Controlling CH/HW/Cooking	***	**	**	***	**	**	*
Advice on Energy Labelling	*	***	**	**	***	*	***
SUPPLEMENTARY INFO.							
Giving more info on Grants	**	***	*	**	**	**	*
Giving more info on Measures	*	**	**	**	***	*	n/r
More info on Condensing Boilers	**	**	***	**	*	***	***
Central Heating control	***	**	**	**	*	**	**
How often service boiler	**	*	*	*	**	*	*
Cavity wall insulation query	**	**	*	*	**	**	n/r
Solid wall insulation query	**	**	**	**	**	*	**
Unused fireplace/chimney query	***	**	**	**	**	**	**

SUMMARY TABLE: OVERALL PERFORMANCE OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES – 2003 (Continued)

MAJOR FUEL COs/GROUPS Good *** Adequate ** Poor *	British Gas	EDF Energy	npower	Powergen	Scottish & Southern	Scottish Power	Atlantic
SUPPLEMENTARY INFO (cont)							
More info on Low Energy Bulbs	**	**	**	***	**	**	*
Whether do Home Visits	*	**	**	***	**	***	*
Whether can send Booklet	**	***	**	**	**	***	**
Whether can send List	**	**	**	*	***	**	***
Whether adviser is Trained	**	**	***	**	***	***	***
ASKING CALLER DETAILS							
% asked for Name/Address/Tel	**	**	**	**	**	**	***
PRINTED INFORMATION							
Sending Booklet promised	**	***	**	**	**	***	***
Sending Grant/EEC Info	*	**	***	**	*	**	*
Sending Questionnaire	***	***	***	*	*	***	*
Sending Home Energy Report	*	**	*	**	*	*	*
Amount of Information sent	*	***	*	*	*	**	*
OVERALL RATINGS							
Knowledge of Energy Efficiency	**	***	**	***	***	**	***
Professionalism	**	***	***	**	***	**	***
Politeness	**	**	**	**	***	*	***
Ease of Understanding Advice	**	**	**	**	**	*	***
Take-up of Measures Advised	**	***	**	*	**	**	**
Overall Usefulness	**	***	**	**	**	**	*
TOTAL STARS (Max: 99)	64	77	65	62	69	64	63

Notes:

1. The star rating system has been changed since 2002 so that now 3 stars=Good, 2 stars=Adequate, and 1 star=Poor. This change has been made to allow for more objective assessment against the Good Practice guidelines, rather than comparing companies against each other as Average, Above Average and Below Average as in 2002.
2. Five more ratings have been added in the Supplementary Information section, bringing the total possible number of stars to 99; the lowest possible rating would be 33.
3. n/r = not rated, because of the small sample size for Atlantic and so a lack of data.

FINDINGS SUMMARY TABLE: OVERALL PERFORMANCE OF GENERAL CALL CENTRES - 2002

MAJOR FUEL COMPANIES Above *** Average ** Below *	British Gas	London Elec.	SWEB	Virgin	npower	Yorkshire	Northern	Powergen	Southern	Scot. Hydro	SWA-LEC	Scot. Power	Manweb	Seaboard	TXU Eastern	TXU Norweb
First calls successful	***	***	**	***	***	**	**	***	***	**	**	**	**	***	***	**
Speed of Response	*	***	***	**	*	*	***	*	***	***	*	***	***	**	***	*
High proportion of callers referred to En. Effic. Helpline	**	***	*	*	**	*	*	***	**	**	*	*	*	***	*	*
TOTAL STARS (Max: 9)	6	9	6	6	6	4	6	7	8	7	4	6	6	8	7	4

SUMMARY TABLE: OVERALL PERFORMANCE OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES - 2002

MAJOR FUEL COs/GROUPS Above *** Average ** Below *	British Gas	London/SWEB	npower	Yorkshire	Northern	Powergen	Scottish & Southern	Scottish Power	Manweb	Seaboard	TXU Energi
CALL HANDLING											
First calls successful	**	**	***	***	*	***	**	*	**	*	*
Speed of Response	***	*	**	*	***	**	**	**	**	*	**
PROVIDING ADVICE											
Asking about Home/Quest'aire	***	***	**	**	***	**	***	*	*	***	*
Asking about Benefits/Age	**	**	*	*	***	***	*	*	*	**	**
Advice on Measures to install	***	**	**	*	**	***	***	*	*	***	*
Advice on Grants/EEC	***	***	***	*	**	***	**	*	*	***	**
On Controlling CH/HW/Cooking	***	**	**	***	*	***	***	*	*	**	**
Advice on Energy Labelling	**	***	**	*	**	**	**	*	*	**	**
SUPPLEMENTARY INFO											
Giving more info on Grants	***	**	*	***	***	*	***	*	**	***	*
Giving more info on Measures	**	**	***	***	***	*	**	**	**	**	**
More info on Condensing Boilers	***	**	**	***	**	**	**	*	*	***	**
More info on Low Energy Bulbs	***	**	**	**	**	**	**	*	*	**	**
Whether do Home Visits	*	***	*	*	**	**	**	***	**	***	*
Whether can send Booklet	**	***	***	no data	***	***	***	**	**	**	**
Whether can send List	**	***	***	**	**	**	**	*	*	***	**
Whether adviser is Trained	**	**	**	***	***	***	***	*	*	**	*
ASKING CALLER DETAILS											
% asked for Name/Address/Tel	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	*	**	**	**

SUMMARY TABLE: OVERALL PERFORMANCE OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES – 2002 (Continued)

MAJOR FUEL COs/GROUPS Above *** Average ** Below *	British Gas	London/ SWEB	npower	Yorkshire	Northern	Powergen	Scottish & Southern	Scottish Power	Manweb	Seeboard	TXU Energi
PRINTED INFORMATION											
Sending Booklet promised	**	***	**	**	**	**	**	**	*	***	*
Sending Grant/EEC Info	*	*	***	**	***	***	*	*	*	***	*
Sending Questionnaire	*	**	**	**	**	*	*	*	*	*	**
Sending Home Energy Report	*	***	**	***	***	*	*	*	*	*	*
Amount of Information sent	**	**	***	***	***	***	**	*	*	**	**
OVERALL RATINGS											
Knowledge of Energy Efficiency	***	***	**	**	**	**	***	*	*	**	*
Professionalism	***	***	**	**	***	**	***	*	*	**	**
Politeness	***	**	**	**	**	**	***	*	**	***	**
Ease of Understanding Advice	**	**	**	*	**	**	**	**	**	**	**
Take-up of Measures Advised	**	***	**	**	**	**	***	*	*	***	**
Overall Usefulness	**	***	**	**	***	**	***	*	*	***	*
TOTAL STARS (Max: 84)	63	66	60	55	66	61	63	35	37	64	45

INTRODUCTION

Background

This is the second mystery shopping study commissioned by Ofgem, the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets, which is the regulator for the gas and electricity industries in Great Britain. Ofgem wishes to examine the energy suppliers' performance in providing energy efficiency advice to domestic customers, to see how this has changed since the first mystery shopping survey was done in 2002, and whether it complies with Ofgem's guidelines for *Good Practice*. Under the terms of their licences (Standard Condition 25), these companies are required to promote the efficient use of their fuels, and to provide energy efficiency advice (free of charge) to customers via an energy efficiency helpline manned by suitably qualified advisers. Companies are also expected to identify callers to their general call centres who could benefit from advice on energy efficiency, and to refer them to the specialist advice line.

Suppliers should produce a code of practice that explains energy efficiency measures which customers may wish to adopt, and that lists independent sources of advice and grants. Any such information provided should be up-to-date, technically correct, and presented in a format which is readily understood by customers. The code should include practical information on how to use gas and electricity more efficiently, and include examples of energy efficiency improvements, together with their costs and savings. These could include insulation, draughtproofing, low energy lighting, energy efficient appliances, and better heating controls.

Under EEC schemes, suppliers are required to provide help with the provision of energy saving measures such as loft insulation, cavity wall insulation, draughtproofing, compact fluorescent lamps and efficient boilers and controls. Advice on energy efficiency may include referrals to suitable EEC schemes, as well as the Government's Warm Front grants (and respective schemes in Scotland and Wales), which are available to customers on income related benefits or tax credits.

The initial three year EEC programme, which replaced the Energy Efficiency Standards of Performance from April 1, 2002, places an obligation on all suppliers with 15,000 or more customers to achieve a level of energy savings set by Government. At least 50% of these savings must be targeted at customers on benefits or tax credits (similar to Warm Front). It is estimated that the total value of EEC is around £150 million p.a., and to cost each customer £3.60 per fuel p.a., between 2002 and 2005.

Ofgem is contributing to the Government's Fuel Poverty Strategy, which has set a target for eliminating fuel poverty, initially among vulnerable groups by 2010. Fuel poor households are defined as those needing to spend more than 10% of their income on fuel in order to heat their homes to a comfortable standard. Ofgem has published a Social Action Plan, which sets out the ways it is working with fuel companies and others to help tackle fuel poverty. There are several key elements to the Social Action Plan: one is to strengthen the code of practice obligations on companies to provide more protection to vulnerable customers - e.g. those with payment difficulties, prepayment meters, the disabled, elderly or sick; this involves effective monitoring (each quarter) of suppliers' performance in relation to the Social Action Plan, including energy efficiency advice.

As well as collecting from each fuel supplier information relating to the energy advice it has provided (now published at www.ofgem.gov.uk/sap/keyindicators/charts/ee1.pdf). Ofgem has

committed itself to undertaking qualitative monitoring of the energy advice services of fuel suppliers; this survey forms part of that programme.

Following publication in May 2002 of the first *Report on the quality of energy efficiency advice provided by gas and electricity suppliers*, Ofgem held a series of consultations with suppliers to review the findings and the apparent shortcomings of some companies. Ofgem then published in February 2003 *Good practice in the provision of energy efficiency advice*. This guide outlined Good Practice principles and highlighted four areas where Ofgem expected fuel suppliers to improve their performance:

1. Using calls made by customers to explore the possibilities for improving the energy efficiency of customers' homes, and ensuring advice is relevant to their circumstances - i.e. not just addressing the "presenting problem", but finding out about each customer's home and circumstances and advising appropriate energy efficiency improvements.
2. Following up customers' calls with printed information, energy audits or home visits (as appropriate) to encourage customers to proceed with the measures advised.
3. Identifying and helping customers who might qualify for grants/EEC schemes – e.g. by asking relevant questions, providing information on schemes, and encouraging contact with energy efficiency advice lines (who may also handle EEC schemes).
4. Ensuring easy access, professional help and positive outcomes – e.g. by publicising Freephone or local call rate numbers, answering calls promptly, recording customer details and advice provided/information sent, training staff to City & Guilds standards, and monitoring outcomes of the advice provided.

Since January 2002, when the first Mystery Shopping Study was done, the energy supply market has continued to see mergers and amalgamations of call centre services. Several smaller suppliers whose call centres were assessed in 2002 have since disappeared. The main groupings covered in the 2002 and 2003 Mystery Shopping are as follows:

2002	2003
British Gas	British Gas
London Electricity SWEB Virgin	EDF Energy
SEEBOARD	
npower Yorkshire Northern	npower
Scottish & Southern Scottish Hydro Southern SWALEC	Scottish & Southern
Scottish Power	Scottish Power
MANWEB	
Powergen	Powergen
TXU Energi (inc Eastern & Norweb)	
Atlantic	Atlantic

This table may be useful to readers when comparing 2002 and 2003 results in the Tables.

Purpose of the research

Ofgem wanted this research to focus primarily on the electricity and gas suppliers' energy advisory services, and to provide information which could be directly compared with the results of the first mystery shopping study of 2002. It wished to explore:

1. Whether the General Call Centres of fuel suppliers are good at recognising customers who need energy efficiency advice and refer them to their Energy Efficiency Helplines (i.e. by providing the correct telephone number to call).
2. Whether the energy efficiency advice services provided by the fuel suppliers comply with the codes of practice obligations and Ofgem's latest guidance on *Good Practice*.
3. Whether advice and information provided is accurate and appropriate.
4. Whether any advice given takes proper account of customers' circumstances (e.g. disabled, elderly, on benefits, spending a high proportion of income on fuel etc.).
5. Whether the advice given is likely to be effective at reaching the Fuel Poor.

This research was designed to highlight good and bad practice in the provision of advice. It will be used by Ofgem to assess how fuel suppliers are approaching their obligations, and in the development of policy and best practice.

Research methods

The research method that was used to meet the objectives of this study was "*Mystery Shopping*" interviews, in which some 173 actual customers of the main gas and electricity suppliers telephoned them with a variety queries which require energy efficiency advice. 48 calls were made initially to the General Call Centres of the 7 main suppliers, and 159 to their Energy Efficiency Helplines. This research method was almost identical to that used in the first mystery shopping survey of 2002, except that the sample was slightly smaller (as the number of suppliers had fallen) and three extra scenarios and some extra supplementary questions were introduced.

Arrangement of the report

The Executive Summary outlines the main findings and conclusions. This Introduction is followed by the Findings section which describes the main findings of the Mystery Shopping study. This covers, in turn, the results of calls to General Call Centres of these suppliers and then calls to their Energy Efficiency Helplines. The findings are illustrated by a series of tables, which compare the results from the 2002 and 2003 mystery shopping surveys.

In the Appendices can be found a more detailed description of the Research Methodology, the questionnaires used in the Mystery Shopping and the Sampling Plan for the survey. We have also included an Acknowledgements section to thank all who assisted in this research.

FINDINGS

General Call Centres

One of the first objectives of this survey has again been to see whether customers of fuel companies are referred to their Energy Efficiency Helplines, if they call the General Call Centres of those companies with queries or problems which could be solved with energy efficiency advice. We used the same three simple scenarios to test this as we did in 2002. Mystery shoppers called the General Call Centre numbers of fuel companies with one of the following three scenarios:

- A. *“I have high fuel bills, which I am finding hard to pay.”*
- B. *“My home is cold and I am elderly/have an elderly relative living with me.”*
- C. *“What help can you give us to save energy?”*

“High fuel bills”, or difficulties with paying fuel bills, are outward signs of Fuel Poverty, and it would be reasonable to expect call handlers to see such customers as needing energy efficiency advice, and also as likely candidates for EEC schemes, which were expanded significantly from 2002. A “cold home” is also a symptom of fuel poverty, and an aged relative (aged 60+) living permanently at that home may qualify the household for a Warm Front (or similar) grant; so again this should be an obvious case where energy efficiency advice may help, and where grant information may be appropriate. The final scenario tested here – *“What help can you give us to help save energy?”* – should be seen as a direct plea for energy efficiency advice by any fuel company’s call handler who has the slightest knowledge of the potential savings from energy efficiency.

Our “ideal model” of how General Call Centres should work in response to queries such as these would be that the call handler should either:

- i) refer the customer at once to the company’s Energy Efficiency Helpline (i.e. by providing the correct telephone number to call), or
- ii) offer a level of advice by trained staff, similar to that which should ideally be offered by the Energy Efficiency Helpline – e.g.:
 - a) checking on fuel bills and identifying the underlying cause of the customer’s problem by asking questions about the home, its insulation and draughtproofing, heating system type/age/controls, and the customer’s circumstances (age/benefits etc); then...
 - b) offering *appropriate* verbal advice based on the information provided; this could include advice on behavioural changes to save energy/improve comfort, and/or energy efficiency measures to install, and it should include advice about available grant and discount schemes; and then...
 - c) following this up with *printed information* about energy efficiency and grants schemes, and (ideally) a printed report of recommendations

appropriate to the customer's home and circumstances, based on a home energy audit and produced by an "expert system" of the sort used for energy advice by some of these companies and by Energy Efficiency Advice Centres.

The sections which follow look first in general (and then in detail for each company) at how the calls made to the General Call Centres of each of the suppliers were handled, and how many of them resulted in referrals to the Energy Efficiency Helplines of those companies. The data are summarised in a series of Tables in the text.

How quickly General Call Centres respond to calls, and how they respond

The first things we asked our Mystery Shoppers to note down was how long the General Call Centres took to respond to their telephone call, how the call was handled, and how they were greeted. Results are summarised in Table 1.

In 2003 we found that slightly fewer callers (79%) succeeded in getting through to the General Call Centre at their first attempt; 87% had been successful first time in 2002.

This year we also recorded the total number of unsuccessful calls, and our ten callers who did not get through first time made a total of 28 unsuccessful calls. Our one mystery shopper who called the Atlantic General Call Centre made five unsuccessful calls and never got through. British Gas was also poor at answering the telephone: three of our eight callers failed to get through first time, and between them made 9 unsuccessful calls before making contact. Some callers to EDF Energy and Powergen also clocked up two or three unsuccessful calls each. We believe that this level of unsuccessful calls is unacceptably high and should be improved.

Some callers did get through within a few seconds to most call centres, but a few still had to wait unacceptably long times – e.g. over 7 minutes to get through to British Gas and Powergen, and over 5 minutes to get through to npower.

In 2003 even fewer calls were answered directly by a call handler (2% - compared to 11% in 2002) and companies seem to be relying even more than before on touchtone options (63%) and/or queueing systems (21%). Powergen and Scottish Power also seem to rely to some extent on answerphones.

When callers did get through they found that they were usually greeted with a "Good morning" or "good afternoon" (88% - almost the same as in 2002) but only just over half (56%) were answered with the company's name; this is however a slight improvement on 2002 when only 47% of call handlers gave the company's name. Call handlers who rarely answered the phone with their company's name were found at British Gas, EDF Energy, Powergen and Scottish & Southern.

Only about half the call handlers gave their own name (54% - as in 2002) although most (79%) asked how they might help. We believe that it does help build rapport with customers if call handlers do give their names unasked.

(See Tables 1A and 1B)

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO GENERAL CALL CENTRES, JAN/FEB 2002

TABLE 1A

MAJOR FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	ALL		British Gas	London Elec.	SWEB	Virgin	npower	Yorkshire	North-ern	Power gen	Southern	Scot. Hydro	SWA-LEC	Scot. Power	Man-web	See-board	TXU Eastern	TXU Norweb
	No	%	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
All Calls to General Call Centres	85	100	6	6	5	1	5	5	6	6	6	5	6	6	5	6	5	6
CUSTOMER TYPES																		
Gas only customers	7	8	4	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Electricity only customers	37	44	0	4	5	0	0	2	2	1	2	4	3	3	3	3	3	2
Both	31	36	2	1	0	1	3	2	1	3	4	0	3	2	0	3	2	4
Neither (posed as new customers)	10	12	0	1	0	0	2	0	2	2	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0

SUCCESSFUL CALL RATE																		
No. of first calls successful	74	87	6	6	3	1	5	3	5	6	6	4	5	4	4	6	5	5
Time to get through - Shortest	0"		45"	12"	20"		30"	3"	15"	3"	30"	0"	32"	10"	10"	4"	10"	5"
Longest	15'20"	n/a	14' 10"	2' 06"	1' 15"	20"	7' 58"	15'20"	1'22"	5'26"	1'39"	2'00"	7'30"	2' 10"	2' 20"	3' 30"	2' 21"	8'55"
Length of successful calls - Shortest	1'		2'	1'	4'		2'	2'	1'		2'	3'	1'		1'		3'	
Longest	23'	n/a	8'	11'	20'	8'	7'	23'	5'	3'	17'	28'	10'	no info	6'	no info	20'	no info

HOW CALL HANDLED																		
Answered at once by CH	9	11	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	3
Involved touchtone options	41	48	2	4	0	0	1	1	5	3	6	3	0	3	3	4	4	2
Queuing system	24	28	3	1	2	1	4	2	0	1	0	1	3	1	2	2	1	0
Engaged	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Answerphone	6	7	1	0	2	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Disconnected/no reply	3	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Other outcomes	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

GREETING																		
Good morning	74	87	6	6	5	1	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	4	6
Company name	40	47	4	4	2	1	3	2	3	5	3	1	1	0	1	2	4	4
Call handler's name	46	54	6	2	4	0	3	5	2	1	4	3	0	4	1	4	3	4
How may I help?	72	85	5	5	5	1	5	5	5	6	6	4	3	4	4	5	4	5
Ask for customer details	41	48	5	3	1	0	2	4	1	1	6	1	3	1	3	6	3	1
Other	8	9	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	1	2	1	0

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO GENERAL CALL CENTRES, SEPT 2003

TABLE 1B

MAJOR FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	ALL		British Gas	EDF Energy	npower	Powergen/ TXU	Scottish & Southern	Scottish Power	Atlantic
	No	%	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
All Calls to General Call Centres	48	100	8	7	8	8	8	8	1
CUSTOMER TYPES									
Gas only customers	6	13	3	1	0	1	0	0	1
Electricity only customers	16	33	0	3	2	3	3	5	0
Both	25	52	5	2	6	4	5	3	0
Neither (posed as new customers)	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0

SUCCESSFUL CALL RATE									
No. of first calls successful	38	79	5	6	7	6	7	7	0
No. of unsuccessful calls	28	58	9	5	1	6	1	1	5
Time to get through - Shortest	1"		25"	5"	3"	10"	1"	45"	
Longest	7'23"	n/a	7'10"	3'12"	5'10"	7'23"	3'6"	3'	4'30"
Length of successful calls - Shortest	30"		2'	30"	30"	1'	1'	2'	
Longest	25'	n/a	22'53"	7'12"	9'50"	20'	25'	12'30"	No data

HOW CALL HANDLED									
Answered at once by CH	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Involved touchtone options	30	63	4	6	6	3	7	4	0
Queuing system	10	21	3	0	1	1	1	3	1
Engaged	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Answerphone	4	8	0	0	0	3	0	1	0
Disconnected/no reply	2	4	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Other outcomes	1	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0

GREETING									
Good morning	42	88	7	6	8	5	8	8	0
Company name	27	56	2	3	8	2	4	8	0
Call handler's name	26	54	7	3	3	3	6	4	0
How may I help?	38	79	7	4	6	6	7	8	0
Ask for customer details	25	52	4	6	1	3	7	4	0
Other	12	25	0	2	0	1	3	6	0

How call handlers responded to customers' problems at General Call Centres

We found that some companies were still poor at referring our mystery shoppers (who called with fairly obvious energy efficiency enquiries) to their Energy Efficiency Helplines. In 2002 71% of callers were referred to Energy Efficiency Helplines (46% at once, and 25% after being given some advice). In 2003 we find that the pattern has changed but little: only 73% are referred (or transferred) to Energy Efficiency Helplines (46% being referred at once and 10% transferred at once, plus 17% referred after being given some advice).

Since the actual number of calls to each company was quite small, the results by company group are not very robust, but they do suggest that some groups like EDF Energy and Scottish Power may have improved since 2002 in their ability to refer energy efficiency queries, while others have not. The figures below summarise the overall results (with data for 2002 showing the combined results by company groupings *as they are now*):

% GCC CALLS REFERRED TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES (Promptly, or after giving some advice)	2002	2003
ALL CALLS TO GENERAL CALL CENTRES	71%	73%
British Gas	83%	88%
London SWEB/EDF Energy	78%	100%
npower	56%	63%
Powergen/TXU	71%	50%
Scottish & Southern	82%	63%
Scottish Power	71%	100%
Atlantic	0%	no contact

The only companies which in 2003 *immediately* referred or transferred at least half of our callers to their Energy Efficiency Helplines were Scottish Power (88%), EDF Energy (71%), British Gas (50%), Powergen (50%) and Scottish & Southern (50%). One other caller to the British Gas General Call Centre was “overflowed” directly to the Energy Efficiency Helpline without talking to a call handler, because all the General Call Centre lines were busy; we have not counted this as a “referral”. Nor have we counted as a referral the caller to British Gas who was directly transferred to the Home Energy Careline instead (although the advice given has been counted alongside the Energy Efficiency Helpline’s advice).

Eighteen of our mystery shoppers who were not immediately transferred or referred to the Energy Efficiency Helpline were instead offered some advice by the call handlers at the General Call Centres. But we found that this advice was usually less comprehensive than that supplied by Energy Efficiency Helplines, and not any better than the advice given by General Call Centres in 2002. Few callers were asked about benefits (2) or age (1), or told about grants (3), and none were told about EEC schemes. Few were advised on energy saving measures to install (4), although 7 of the 18 callers offered advice by General Call Centres were given verbal advice on controlling heating or hot water, and four were offered a booklet on energy efficiency.

A few callers (3) were advised how to spread their payments, rather than how to reduce them. Some were referred to other organisations like Stay Warm, or given advice to use their appliances less. One caller to npower was refused any help as the call handler maintained she was not a customer. We conclude that there is still plenty of room for improvements in both referrals and advice at General Call Centres.

(See Tables 2A and 2B)

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO GENERAL CALL CENTRES, JAN/FEB 2002

TABLE 2A

MAJOR FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	ALL		British Gas	London Elec.	SWEB	Virgin	npower	Yorkshire	North-ern	Power gen	Southern	Scot. Hydro	SWA-LEC	Scot. Power	Man-web	See-board	TXU Eastern	TXU Norweb
	No	%	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
All calls to General Call Centres	85	100	6	6	5	1	5	5	6	6	6	5	6	6	5	6	5	6
a.Referred to: another Call Handler	3	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
a. Ref. to Energy Efficiency Helpline	39	46	3	5	1	0	2	2	3	6	2	0	4	3	2	4	1	1
b.i. Asked a few questions	21	25	1	0	4	1	1	2	0	0	4	2	1	0	2	0	3	0
b.ii Asked detailed questions	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
c. Offered to send Questionnaire about my home	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
d. Asked about fuel bills	12	14	0	0	4	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	1
e. CH accessed my bills/records	17	20	2	0	1	1	2	1	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	2	2	2
f. Asked about Benefits	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
g. Asked about age/anyone 60+	2	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
h. Asked about Temp. in home	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
i. Asked about state of fridge	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
j. Verbal advice on measures	11	13	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	3	0	1	0	0	1	1
k. Verbal advice on heating/HW	12	14	2	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
l. Verbal advice on cooking/refrig.	4	5	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
m. How to keep warm in winter	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
n. Would send Booklet on En.Eff.	16	19	0	2	4	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	0	2	1
o. Sending list of sources of advice	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
p. Told me about grants	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
q. Told me about own EEC scheme	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
r. Told me of Fridgesavers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
s. Told me about Energy Labelling	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
t. Told me about Tariffs/meters/ payments	17	20	1	1	2	0	1	2	0	0	2	1	1	0	0	2	2	2
u. Offered a Home Visit	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
v. Gave advice & referred to EEH	21	25	2	1	1	0	2	0	0	1	3	4	1	0	0	3	1	2
w. Referred me to another agency	12	14	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	4
x. Other outcomes	13	15	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	0	2	0	2	0	3	1	1	0
y. Could not help/could not suggest who might	3	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO GENERAL CALL CENTRES, SEPT 2003
TABLE 2B

MAJOR FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	ALL		British Gas	EDF Energy	npower	Powergen/ TXU	Scottish & Southern	Scottish Power	Atlantic
	No	%	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
All Calls to General Call Centres	48	100	8	7	8	8	8	8	1
RESPONSE TO ENQUIRY									
a. Referred to: another Call Handler	2	4	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
a. Direct transfer to another department	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
a. Ref. to Energy Efficiency Helpline	22	46	1	5	3	4	3	6	0
a. Direct transfer to Energy Efficiency Helpline	5	10	3	0	0	0	1	1	0
a. Overflowed from GCC to EEH	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
b.i. Asked a few questions	9	19	0	2	3	1	3	0	0
b.ii Asked detailed questions	2	4	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
b.iii Asked about water heating/tank insulation	3	6	1	0	0	0	2	0	0
b.iv Asked about controls on hot water system	2	4	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
b.v Asked about age of storage heaters/controls	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
c. Offered to send Questionnaire about my home	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
d. Asked about fuel bills	3	6	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
e. CH accessed my bills/records	9	19	2	3	1	1	1	1	0
f. Asked about Benefits	2	4	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
g. Asked about age/anyone 60+	1	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
h. Asked about Temp. in home	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
i. Asked about state of fridge	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
j. Verbal advice on measures	4	8	1	0	0	0	3	0	0
k. Verbal advice on heating/HW	7	15	1	3	1	0	2	0	0
l. Verbal advice on cooking/refrigeration	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
m. How to keep warm in winter	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
n. Would send Booklet on Energy Efficiency	4	8	1	0	0	1	2	0	0
o. Sending list of sources of advice	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
p.i Told me about grants	3	6	1	0	1	0	1	0	0
p.ii Told process/timescale without me asking	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
q.i Told me about own EEC scheme	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
q.ii Told process/timescale without me asking	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
r. Told me of Fridgesavers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
s.i Told me about Energy Labelling	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
s.ii Offered Energy Labelling leaflet	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
t. Told me about Tariffs/meters/ payments	3	6	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
u.i Offered a Home Visit to give advice	1	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
u.ii Offered Surveyor visit re grant eligibility	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
v. Gave advice & referred to EEH	8	17	2	2	2	0	1	1	0
w. Referred me to another agency	2	4	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
x. Other outcomes	7	15	1	0	3	2	1	0	0
y. Could not help/could not suggest who might	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

How call handlers at General Call Centres responded to supplementary questions

Because most callers were referred to the Energy Efficiency Helplines of their fuel suppliers, there were limited opportunities for most of them to ask some of the supplementary questions we had suggested. The following Tables 3 to 5 summarise the main findings from 2002 and 2003. We have not shown analysis by company here because of the small bases.

In 2002 we found that call handlers at General Call Centres had rather poor knowledge of most of the measures our callers asked about (except for CFLs). The same appears to be true still in 2003.

TABLE 3	ALL			
	JAN/FEB 2002		SEPT 2003	
HOW QUESTIONS WERE ANSWERED	No	%	No	%
All Calls to General Call Centres	85	100	48	100
GRANT INFORMATION				
No. asking for more details of Grants	2	2	1	2
CH gave Name of scheme	1	1	1	2
CH said what scheme covered	0	0	0	0
CH told caller how to apply	1	1	0	0
CH knew how long to install	0	0	0	0
CH knew cost to customer	0	0	0	0
CH knew likely savings	0	0	0	0
MEASURES RECOMMENDED INFORMATION				
No. asking for info on Measures	6	7	3	6
CH knew costs	1	1	0	0
CH knew effects/savings	4	5	1	2
CH said grant may be available	1	1	0	0

TABLE 4	ALL			
	JAN/FEB 2002		SEPT 2003	
HOW QUESTIONS WERE ANSWERED (continued)	No	%	No	%
All Calls to General Call Centres	85	100	48	100
CONDENSING BOILER QUERY				
No. asking about Cond. Boilers	14	16	3	6
CH provided useful information	5	6	1	2
CENTRAL HEATING SYSTEM QUERY				
No. asking about central heating system	n/a		7	15
CH advised switching heating on and off/using timer			2	4
CH advised annual servicing of boiler			3	6
CAVITY WALL INSULATION QUERY				
No. asking about cavity wall insulation	n/a		0	0
CH provided useful information			0	0
SOLID WALL INSULATION QUERY				
No. asking about solid wall insulation	n/a		2	4
CH provided useful information			0	0
CH knew costs			0	0
LOW ENERGY BULBS QUERY				
No. asking about Low Energy Bulbs	18	21	4	8
CH explained what they are	13	15	2	4
CH quoted costs/savings	11	13	1	2
UNUSED FIREPLACE/CHIMNEY QUERY				
No. asking about unused fireplace/chimney	n/a		0	0
CH provided useful information			0	0

Our one caller who asked about grants he had been told of was only told the name of the scheme. Three callers asked for more information on measures advised, but only one call handler knew the likely effects and savings; none knew the costs or whether a grant might be available. Two call handlers could provide no useful information about condensing boilers. Seven callers asked about how best to control their heating and how often to have a boiler serviced, but only two were advised to switch their heating on and off using the timer, and only three were advised to arrange annual servicing. No call handlers could advise our two callers who asked about solid wall insulation. Of four callers who asked about CFLs, only two were told what these were and only one what they might cost or save.

(See Tables 3 and 4, above)

The six call handlers at General Call Centres who were asked about home visits had various views on the availability of this service. Only one thought the company offered home visits; one said it did not; one did not know; and three felt these were only offered under some circumstances or in some areas. Knowledge about this (or the availability of home visits) seems poorer than in 2002.

But call handlers did seem to know more in 2003 about the availability of booklets on energy efficiency. All five callers who enquired about these were offered one, as were four of the five who asked for a list of other sources of advice. Two out of three call handlers claimed to have been trained in energy efficiency.

(See Table 5, below)

TABLE 5	ALL			
	JAN/FEB 2002		SEPT 2003	
HOW QUESTIONS WERE ANSWERED (continued)	No	%	No	%
All Calls to General Call Centres	85	100	48	100
HOME VISITS				
No. asking about Home Visits	19	22	6	13
CH said Home Visits offered	10	12	1	2
Home Visits not offered	4	5	1	2
Don't know	4	5	1	2
Others (e.g. some areas/PSR)	1	1	3	6
Home visits Free	9	11	0	0
BOOKLET ON ENERGY EFFICIENCY				
No. asking for Booklet	11	13	5	10
Yes - we have one & will send it	6	7	5	10
No - we don't have one	2	2	0	0
Normally have, but out of print	0	0	0	0
Don't know if one available	3	4	0	0
LIST OF OTHER SOURCES OF ADVICE				
No. asking for a list	19	22	5	10
Yes - it's in the Booklet/we'll send one	9	11	4	8
No - we don't have one	10	12	1	2
No. of mentions of other sources	5	6	1	2
TRAINING OF ADVISERS				
No. asking if adviser was trained	5	6	3	6
CHs claiming to be trained	3	4	2	4

How our mystery shoppers rated the call handlers at General Call Centres

At the end of these calls to General Call Centres, we asked our mystery shoppers to rate the call handlers on a number of dimensions, but this was usually done only where the call handler had given some advice, and not simply referred our caller at once to the Energy Efficiency Helpline. Scores were awarded for each rating (100 for the top rating and 0 for the lowest) to provide an average score out of 100. The results are shown in full on Tables 6A and 6B.

This year there were no more than 13 mystery shoppers rating the call handlers at General Call Centres (compared to 54 in 2002) so the results will have greater sampling error. Nevertheless there are signs that mystery shoppers now felt that those call handlers who had advised them did know slightly more about energy efficiency than was the case in 2002: call handlers' "average knowledge score" had risen from 23 (out of 100) in 2002, to 41 in 2003.

There has been little change in the "professionalism" rating of call handlers: 78% (of those who gave advice) were rated as professional in 2002: 75% (9 out of 12) were rated as professional in 2003.

The "politeness" score also improved slightly: from 80 in 2002, to 88 in 2003. The "understandability" score also improved marginally from 85 in 2002 to 89 in 2003. Most call handlers are seen as very courteous or polite, and all their advice is seen as "very easy" or "quite easy" to understand.

Although the bases are really too small for reliable assessments of each company's scores, it does seem that companies where General Call Centre call handlers are rated poorly on "knowledge" are Scottish Power (0), Powergen (17), EDF Energy (33) and British Gas (33). Powergen also score lower than all other companies on "politeness" (63) and "ease of understanding advice" (75).

(See Tables 6A and 6B)

In terms of "usefulness" of advice (rated by 21 callers in 2002 but only by 5 in 2003) there is an indication that those few call handlers who do give advice themselves do give more useful advice in 2003 (60 out of 100) compared to the advice given in 2002 (33 out of 100).

(See Tables 7A and 7B)

The main conclusion from these findings is that where call handlers at General Call Centres attempt to give energy efficiency advice themselves (instead of or before referring callers to the Energy Efficiency Helpline) they are mostly polite and professional, but the advice that they do give is not as comprehensive, not based on adequate questioning of customers, and generally more "lightweight" and less useful than advice from Energy Efficiency Helplines.

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO GENERAL CALL CENTRES, JAN/FEB 2002

TABLE 6A

MAJOR FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	ALL		British Gas	London Elec.	SWEB	Virgin	npower	Yorkshire	North-ern	Power gen	Southern	Scot. Hydro	SWA-LEC	Scot. Power	Man-web	See-board	TXU Eastern	TXU Norweb
	No	%	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
All calls to General Call Centres	85	100	6	6	5	1	5	5	6	6	6	5	6	6	5	6	5	6
Impression of Energy Efficiency Knowledge of call handler																		
Knew a great deal about en. effic.	2	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Knew quite a lot about en. effic.	9	11	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	1	0	2	1
Knew only a little about en. effic.	14	16	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	1
Knew nothing about en. efficiency	29	34	4	1	0	0	1	3	3	1	1	0	2	4	3	2	2	2
Average "Knowledge" Score (Max: 100 – based on all answers)	23	23	7	22	58	33	17	8	8	17	42	67	22	0	17	17	34	40

PROFESSIONALISM																		
CH handled call in professional manner	42	49	1	3	4	1	2	2	3	2	4	1	3	1	2	4	4	5
CH handled call in unprofessional manner	12	14	2	0	0	0	1	2	1	0	1	0	0	3	2	0	0	0

POLITENESS																		
CH excellent/very courteous	22	26	1	2	2	0	1	1	0	1	2	1	1	0	1	2	3	4
CH good/polite	21	25	2	1	1	1	1	0	3	1	3	0	2	1	1	2	1	1
CH impersonal	9	11	0	0	0	0	1	3	1	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	0
CH poor/brusque	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
CH rude/aggressive	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Average "Politeness" Score (Max: 100 – based on all answers)	80	80	83	92	92	75	75	63	69	88	85	100	83	56	56	88	94	95

EASE OF UNDERSTANDING ADVICE																		
Very easy to understand	20	24	0	1	0	0	2	1	1	1	3	0	2	2	1	0	3	3
Quite easy to understand	21	25	3	0	2	1	0	2	1	0	2	1	1	1	2	3	1	1
Some things easy/some things hard to understand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Quite hard to understand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Very hard to understand	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Average "Understandability" Score (Max:100, base:all answers)	85	85	75	100	75	75	100	63	88	100	90	75	92	92	83	75	94	94

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO GENERAL CALL CENTRES, SEPT 2003
TABLE 6B

MAJOR FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	ALL		British Gas	EDF Energy	npower	Powergen/ TXU	Scottish & Southern	Scottish Power	Atlantic
	No	%	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
All Calls to General Call Centres	48	100	8	7	8	8	8	8	1
IMPRESSIONS OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY KNOWLEDGE OF CALL HANDLER									
Knew a great deal about energy efficiency	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Knew quite a lot about energy efficiency	5	10	0	0	1	0	4	0	0
Knew only a little about energy efficiency	3	6	0	1	1	1	0	0	0
Knew nothing about energy efficiency	4	8	2	0	0	1	0	1	0
Average "Knowledge" Score (Max: 100)	41	41	33	33	50	17	67	0	No data

PROFESSIONALISM									
CH handled call in professional manner	9	19	2	1	2	0	3	1	0
CH handled call in unprofessional manner	3	6	1	0	0	2	0	0	0

POLITENESS									
CH excellent/very courteous	7	15	2	0	1	0	3	1	0
CH good/polite	4	8	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
CH impersonal	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
CH poor/brusque	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
CH rude/aggressive	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Average "Politeness" Score (Max: 100)	88	88	92	75	88	63	100	100	No data

EASE OF UNDERSTANDING ADVICE									
Very easy to understand	6	13	1	1	1	0	2	1	0
Quite easy to understand	5	10	1	0	1	2	1	0	0
Some things easy/some things hard to u'stand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Quite hard to understand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Very hard to understand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Average "Understandability" Score (Max: 100)	89	89	88	100	88	75	92	100	No data

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO GENERAL CALL CENTRES, JAN/FEB 2002
TABLE 7A

TABLE 7A	ALL		British Gas	London Elec.	SWEB	Virgin	npower	Yorkshire	North-ern	Power gen	South ern	Scot. Hydro	SWA-LEC	Scot. Power	Man web	See-board	TXU Eastn	TXU Norweb
	No	%	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
All Calls to General Call Centres	85	100	6	6	5	1	5	5	6	6	6	5	6	6	5	6	5	6
Very useful	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Quite useful	3	4	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Not very useful	12	14	0	1	2	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
Not at all useful	5	6	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0
Average "Usefulness" Score (Max: 100)	33	33	no data	33	44	33	33	17	33	n/d	33	100	33	11	22	n/d	50	33

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO GENERAL CALL CENTRES, SEPT 2003
TABLE 7B

MAJOR FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	ALL		British Gas	EDF Energy	npower	Powergen/TXU	Scottish & Southern	Scottish Power	Atlantic
	No	%	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
All Calls to General Call Centres	48	100	8	7	8	8	8	8	1
OVERALL USEFULNESS OF ADVICE									
Very useful	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Quite useful	3	6	0	0	1	0	2	0	0
Not very useful	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Not at all useful	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Average "Usefulness" Score (Max: 100)	60	60	100	No data	67	0	67	No data	No data

Conclusions on the General Call Centres

1. From these 48 calls to General Call Centres we found that just over three quarters of the calls made by customers to General Call Centres are successfully connected at the first attempt (79%) whereas 87% of first calls got through in 2002. Some callers made several unsuccessful attempts, or simply gave up after waiting after several minutes. A few had to wait unacceptably long times (e.g. over 5 minutes) to be connected to British Gas, npower and Powergen. But once callers do get through, they are usually dealt with in a polite and professional manner.
2. Over half (56%) of customers who call with the sorts of problems we tested now seem likely to be referred or transferred *immediately* to their supplier's Energy Efficiency Helpline – this is an improvement on 2002 when only 46% were. Some callers (17%) are instead given some sort of advice by the General Call Centre before being referred on to the helpline. Altogether therefore 73% of callers are finally referred to Energy Efficiency Helplines, compared to 71% who were referred in 2002.
3. Some companies' General Call Centres appear to be good at transferring or referring almost all these energy efficiency enquiries to the Energy Efficiency Helpline: EDF Energy and Scottish Power referred all our callers, and British Gas referred 88%. But some other companies are still rather poor at spotting customers who need specialist energy efficiency advice: npower and Scottish & Southern referred only 63% of callers, and Powergen referred only half.
4. Where General Call Centres give energy efficiency advice themselves (with or without later referring callers to the Energy Efficiency Helpline) the advice is usually less comprehensive than that supplied by the Energy Efficiency Helplines. Few callers were asked about benefits or age, or told about grants, and none were told about EEC schemes. Few were advised on energy saving measures to install, although around half of the callers offered advice by General Call Centres were given verbal advice on controlling heating or hot water. A few were advised how to spread their payments, rather than how to reduce them.
5. Although some call handlers claim to be trained in energy awareness, most mystery shoppers felt that the call handlers did not know a great deal about energy efficiency, although they did seem to know a little more than a year ago. Although their advice was found "quite easy" or "very easy to understand", most of our callers also felt this advice was not "very useful" – and less useful than many callers later found the advice from the Energy Efficiency Helplines.
6. Although slightly more customers with energy efficiency queries are now recognised and referred to helplines by General Call Centres, we conclude that there is still some room for improvement. Call handlers who try to provide adequate advice themselves are not as well-equipped as specialist advisers at the Energy Efficiency Helpline. We believe that there is a need for more training of General Call Centre staff to help them recognise when customers could benefit from "energy efficiency advice", even if they do not ask for this directly.

Energy Efficiency Helplines

In this section of the report we first look at how rapidly these Energy Efficiency Helplines respond to calls, and how they answer them. Then we look at how they respond (collectively) to the eight *scenarios* tested, and how *each company's* helpline responded to our mystery shoppers' queries. Then we explore how each company responded to specific supplementary questions (e.g. about CFLs or condensing boilers) or requests - e.g. for a booklet or list of advice sources. Next we look at callers' impressions of the service provided over the telephone by each company. Finally we look at the publications provided by each company, the likely take-up of advice, and how useful the verbal and written advice is thought to be.

The eight Scenarios

The Energy Efficiency Helplines of the major fuel suppliers were tested using the same three scenarios as used on the General Call Centres, plus two more specifically asking about appliances which use less energy, and about grants. These same five scenarios were used in 2002. For 2003 we also introduced three new scenarios, designed to test other areas of advisers' knowledge. The five original (2002) scenarios used were:

- A. *"My bills are too high. I find them hard to pay. How can I cut them down?"*
- B. *"My home gets very cold in winter and I am elderly/have an elderly relative (aged 60+) living here/coming to live here soon. How can I make my home warmer?"*
- C. *"How can I cut down on the amount of energy I use?"*
- D. *"I need to buy a new washing machine (or fridge, freezer, tumble drier) and want advice on which ones use less power."*
- E. *"What grants can I get to make my home warmer and cut my bills?"*

And the three new (for 2003) scenarios were:

- F. *"My home has solid walls and I find it hard to heat. What can I do?/Is there any way of insulating the walls?"*
- G. *"I am worried that heating my water is costing me a lot. Is it better to leave it ON all the time or to switch it ON and OFF?"*
- H. *"I have storage heaters which don't seem to keep my home warm but I've never really understood how they work or how I should control them. Do you have anyone who could come here to show me?"*

Although a number of calls were made to each company on each scenario, the numbers are really too small to provide definitive analysis of how each company handles calls on each type of scenario. We have therefore looked at company performances as a whole, and the major suppliers' performance collectively across the eight scenarios.

Our "ideal model" of how Energy Efficiency Helplines should work in response to most queries such as these would be that the call handler should:

- a) check on fuel bills and identify the underlying cause of the customer's problem by asking questions about the home, its insulation and draughtproofing, heating system type/age/controls, and the customer's circumstances (age/benefits etc); then...

b) offer *appropriate* verbal advice based on the information provided; this could include advice on behavioural changes to save energy/improve comfort, and/or energy efficiency measures to install, and it should include advice about available grant and EEC discount schemes; and then...

c) follow this up with printed information about energy efficiency and grants schemes, and (ideally) a printed report of recommendations appropriate to the customer's home and circumstances, based on a home energy audit and produced by an "expert system" of the sort used for energy advice by some of these companies, and by Energy Efficiency Advice Centres.

Scenarios D and E should possibly produce slightly different responses. In response to Scenario D the call handlers might be expected to talk more about energy labelling, and in response to Scenario E they should perhaps talk more about grants and EEC schemes. But even so, both these scenarios also present opportunities for giving broader energy efficiency advice, as the caller is clearly interested in reducing costs through reducing energy consumption.

The new scenarios F, G and H require more specialised advice. Scenario F (how to insulate solid walls) ideally requires an explanation of some options for "dry-lining" the walls on the inside (or some options for external cladding), but because these options are expensive an adviser should really advise some other possible ways of reducing fuel bills and improving comfort. Advice about water heating (Scenario G) should include advice to turn it on and off with a time switch or programmer, and some checks on how the water is heated, tank and pipe insulation, thermostat settings, tariffs etc. This should also include other energy efficiency advice. Scenario H (a plea for a visit to explain how to control storage heaters to keep the home warm) at least requires an explanation or leaflet about how to control storage heaters, and ideally also a home visit to explain the controls, or alternative advice on how to make the home easier to heat with storage heaters through better insulation.

Identifying households in "Fuel Poverty"

One of the main reasons for asking about a customer's circumstances (e.g. age, benefits, size of fuel bills, temperature in the home, and perhaps even income) is that this is the only way to identify whether a customer is in "fuel poverty". This has been defined broadly as a customer living in a home which is so energy inefficient that it would require the customer to spend 10% or more of disposable income on fuel to maintain it at a reasonable (healthy) temperature. The elimination of "fuel poverty" is now a high national priority, and Ofgem hopes that fuel suppliers will play their part in identifying and helping households which are "fuel poor". We were therefore particularly interested in whether these helplines asked any questions which might help identify customers as "fuel poor".

Successful call rates, speed of response and call lengths

This section (summarised in Tables 8A and 8B) describes how easy or difficult it was for our mystery shoppers to contact these Energy Efficiency Helplines, and how promptly their calls were answered. Our mystery shoppers mostly tried to call these Energy Efficiency Helplines on weekdays during office hours (e.g. 9.00am to 5.00pm).

As in 2002 there were again some big differences in how easy it was for our mystery shoppers to get through to these companies at their first attempt, although the overall proportion of first calls which succeeded went up from 60% to 76%. Companies which again performed poorly (as they had done in 2002) were Powergen and npower (with only about half the first calls successful). Companies which seem to have improved somewhat are British Gas, EDF Energy, Scottish & Southern, Scottish Power and Atlantic (although only 4 calls were made to Atlantic rather than the 24+ to other companies).

% OF FIRST CALLS TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES WHICH WERE SUCCESSFUL	2002	2003
ALL CALLS TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES	60%	76%
British Gas	63%	81%
London SWEB/EDF Energy	59%	93%
npower	63%	52%
Powergen/TXU	59%	50%
Scottish & Southern	66%	84%
Scottish Power	53%	89%
Atlantic	50%	100%

38 of our callers (24%) failed to get through at their first attempt and made a total of 73 unsuccessful calls between them. One caller failed to get through to Powergen (TXU) on five attempts and gave up. This level of failure is likely to put off some serious enquiries. Companies where callers had above average numbers of unsuccessful calls were Powergen (32 unsuccessful calls) and npower (19 unsuccessful calls).

Some callers to all these helplines did get through in seconds, and most got through (when they did so) within two minutes, but a few callers had to wait five minutes or more to get through to Scottish Power (over 8 minutes), British Gas (over 7 minutes), and EDF Energy (exactly 5 minutes).

Once callers did get through the total call length generally reflects how much advice the helpline could provide. Some calls lasted no more than five minutes, but the longest calls to each helpline were between 25 and 37½ minutes.

How calls were handled

For most of our customers the nicest outcome was to be answered at once by a call handler, but this happened marginally less in 2003 (in 38% of cases) than in 2002 (41%). The companies where call handlers tended to answer the phone more promptly themselves were Scottish & Southern (64%), EDF Energy (48%) and Scottish Power (43%).

In 2003 three helplines seem to make extensive use of touchtone options – British Gas (65% of calls), npower (40%) and EDF Energy (22%).

Slightly more callers in 2003 found they had to wait in a queuing system (16%) than in 2002 (11%), especially when calling Scottish Power (43%), EDF Energy (22%) and Powergen (17%).

Answerphones still seem quite widely used (13% now, and 17% in 2002). Companies which make more use of answerphones are Powergen (33%) and npower (28%). We do feel that if Energy Efficiency Helplines offer their advice through dedicated phone numbers, then attempts should be made to make less use of answerphones and to answer more calls directly.

How call handlers greet callers to Energy Efficiency Helplines

The greetings offered by advisers when they do answer the phone have continued to improve: most now greet callers with “good morning” or “good afternoon” (94%), give the company name (81%), their own name (65%) and ask how they can help (87%). But advisers at British Gas and Powergen frequently forget to give the company name.

The extent to which call handlers volunteer their own names still varies quite widely. They usually gave their own names at EDF Energy (78%) and Scottish & Southern (76%), but much less often at Scottish Power and Atlantic (only in 50% of cases). Our view is that it does boost customer confidence if advisers give their names, as several of our mystery shoppers again made a point of telling us the names of advisers who had been particularly helpful.

Most call handlers also asked “How may I help?” (87%), but the number who *initially* asked for customers’ details varied widely: from 80% of callers to Scottish & Southern, to only a quarter of callers to Scottish Power and EDF Energy. Our view is that where Energy Efficiency Helplines can access customers’ billing records, then this may be helpful in determining whether customers’ fuel consumption is unusually high for the type of home, size of family etc.. It may also help the call handler identify customers in “fuel poverty” – e.g. having to spend over 10% of their income on fuel if they are to keep warm in winter.

(See Tables 8A and 8B)

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, JAN/FEB 2002

TABLE 8A

FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	Total		British Gas		London/ SWEB Grp		npower		Yorkshire		Northern		Powergen		Scottish & Southern		Scottish Power		Manweb		SEEBOARD		TXU Energi (East/Norweb)	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Major Suppliers	235	100	27	100	23	100	20	100	9	100	20	100	23	100	29	100	20	100	18	100	23	100	23	100
CUSTOMER TYPES																								
Gas only customers	26	11	14	52	0	0	2	10	0	0	1	5	3	13	3	10	0	0	0	0	2	9	1	4
Electricity only customers	95	40	3	11	17	74	2	10	4	44	11	55	5	22	15	52	6	30	12	67	11	48	9	39
Both	76	32	7	26	3	13	7	35	3	33	5	25	11	48	9	31	8	40	3	17	8	35	12	52
Neither (posed as new customers)	38	16	3	11	3	13	9	45	2	22	3	15	4	17	2	7	6	30	3	17	2	9	1	4

SUCCESSFUL CALL RATE																								
No. of first calls successful	141	60	17	63	16	70	16	80	7	78	8	40	20	87	19	66	8	40	12	67	11	48	7	30
Time to get through - Shortest	0"		03"		02"		04"		02"		05"		05"		02"		0"		02"		01"		02"	
Longest	10'15"	n/a	1'20"	n/a	6'50"	n/a	4'31"	n/a	10'15"	n/a	1'	n/a	3'00"	n/a	3'30"	n/a	2'22"	n/a	4'10"	n/a	5'30"	n/a	3'10"	n/a
Length of successful calls - Shortest	1'		2'		2'		1'		4'		3'		1'		6'		1'		1'		3'		4'	
Longest	45'		27'		26'		24'		16'		17'		36'		45'		28'		17'		30'		17'	

HOW CALL HANDLED																								
Answered at once by Call Handler	96	41	1	4	8	35	15	75	7	78	10	50	12	52	13	45	4	20	3	17	16	70	7	30
Involved touchtone options	42	18	16	59	5	22	1	5	0	0	1	5	1	4	1	3	10	50	7	39	0	0	0	0
Queuing system	26	11	1	4	5	22	0	0	2	22	0	0	2	9	5	17	1	5	5	28	0	0	5	22
Engaged	10	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	3	10	0	0	2	11	3	13	1	4
Answerphone	39	17	5	19	5	22	2	10	0	0	8	40	4	17	5	17	2	10	2	11	2	9	4	17
Disconnected/no reply	4	2	0	0	0	0	2	10	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4
Other outcomes	7	3	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	9	2	7	1	5	0	0	0	0	1	4

GREETING																								
Good morning	211	90	25	93	23	100	20	100	8	89	14	70	19	83	29	100	18	90	16	89	20	87	19	83
Company name	170	72	20	74	20	87	17	85	8	89	15	75	14	61	22	76	9	45	7	39	20	87	18	78
Call handler's name	134	57	22	81	19	83	5	25	5	56	2	10	7	30	20	69	13	65	10	56	15	65	16	70
How may I help?	184	78	24	89	23	100	19	95	9	100	15	75	17	74	19	66	12	60	12	67	19	83	15	65
Ask for customer details	95	40	16	59	9	39	4	20	3	33	2	10	7	30	22	76	8	40	7	39	8	35	9	39
Other	37	16	4	15	1	4	1	5	2	22	2	10	7	30	11	38	4	20	3	17	2	9	0	0

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, SEPT 2003

TABLE 8B

MAJOR FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	ALL		British Gas		EDF Energy		npower		Powergen/ TXU		Scottish & Southern		Scottish Power		Atlantic	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Energy Efficiency Helplines	159	100	26	100	27	100	25	100	24	100	25	100	28	100	4	100
CUSTOMER TYPES																
Gas only customers	17	11	5	19	2	7	3	12	5	21	2	8	0	0	0	0
Electricity only customers	55	35	1	4	13	48	9	36	9	38	10	40	13	46	0	0
Both	86	54	20	77	11	41	13	52	10	42	13	52	15	54	4	100
Neither (posed as new customers)	1	1	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

SUCCESSFUL CALL RATE																
No. of first calls successful	121	76	21	81	25	93	13	52	12	50	21	84	25	89	4	100
No. of unsuccessful calls	73	46	8	31	3	11	19	76	32	133	6	24	5	18	0	0
Time to get through - Shortest	1"		2"		5"		1"		6"		1"		2"		5"	
Longest	8'4"	n/a	7'22"	n/a	5'	n/a	2'	n/a	3'10"	n/a	2'25"	n/a	8'4"	n/a	22"	n/a
Length of successful calls - Shortest	2'5"		2'5"		5'		2'30"		5'		3'48"		3'30"		8'	
Longest	37'30"	n/a	37'30"	n/a	36'	n/a	22'33"	n/a	38'	n/a	25'	n/a	26'	n/a	25'	n/a

HOW CALL HANDLED																
Answered at once by CH	61	38	3	12	13	48	4	16	9	38	16	64	12	43	4	100
Involved touchtone options	35	22	17	65	6	22	10	40	0	0	2	8	0	0	0	0
Queuing system	25	16	1	4	6	22	0	0	4	17	2	8	12	43	0	0
Engaged	3	2	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	8	0	0	0	0
Answerphone	21	13	1	4	1	4	7	28	8	33	1	4	3	11	0	0
Disconnected/no reply	6	4	0	0	0	0	2	8	2	8	1	4	1	4	0	0
Other outcomes	6	4	3	12	0	0	2	8	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0

GREETING																
Good morning	150	94	23	88	26	96	24	96	20	83	25	100	28	100	4	100
Company name	129	81	18	69	25	93	23	92	17	71	20	80	23	82	3	75
Call handler's name	104	65	18	69	21	78	15	60	15	63	19	76	14	50	2	50
How may I help?	139	87	21	81	26	96	21	84	20	83	23	92	25	89	3	75
Ask for customer details	65	41	13	50	7	26	8	32	8	33	20	80	7	25	2	50
Other	24	15	2	8	4	15	1	4	4	17	12	48	0	0	1	25

Responses to the customers' queries – by the eight Scenarios

In this section we look at how the Energy Efficiency Helplines responded to each of the eight test scenarios. Full results are shown in Tables 9 to 12, at the end of this section.

Our overall finding is that there have been several improvements since 2002 in the ways in which our test scenarios have been handled by these Energy Efficiency Helplines. More callers are now being asked detailed questions by advisers in order to prepare a *Home Energy Report* and/or to give more appropriate advice. Others are first asked a few questions and then offered a self-completion questionnaire about their homes. Altogether some 90% of callers are now being offered a *Home Energy Report* – almost three times as many as in 2002 (32%).

More callers are now also being asked about benefits (47%) and age (35%) to help establish if they might be eligible for grants. More are now being given verbal advice on measures to install (66%) compared to 2002 (51%), and on controlling their heating/hot water (54% now, 37% in 2002). A booklet on energy efficiency is being offered more readily now (73%, compared to 61% in 2002). A few more people are now being told about grants (48% now, 36% in 2002) but the number told about EEC schemes has stayed pretty constant (23% in 2002 and 21% now). Even in Scenario E when callers asked what grants were available, only 63% were told about grants and 26% about EEC. But only one of our callers who asked for a home visit to explain how their storage heaters worked was offered one: this is disappointing.

Scenario A - "My bills are too high. I find them hard to pay. How can I cut them down?"

When our mystery shoppers complained about having high fuel bills which they found hard to pay, we would ideally have expected energy advisers to have looked at the customer's fuel bills, asked questions about their homes and circumstances, advised all callers on ways of reducing energy consumption through improving energy efficiency, and advised on any grants available which might help install appropriate measures.

In practice we found in 2003 that *all* of our callers who called with this scenario were asked some questions about their home – either a few questions (55%) or detailed questions (45%). Most of those asked just a few questions were also offered a questionnaire about their homes to help the company prepare a *Home Energy Report* (45%). So altogether around 90% were offered a *Home Energy Report* (compared to 35% in 2002).

Advisers asked most callers about their fuel bills, or accessed their records (81%) but still only asked around half about benefits (55%) or age (42%) – vital information to help decide if callers might qualify for grants or EEC schemes.

Having established these facts about the customers and their homes, call handlers gave verbal advice to install energy saving measures to 77% of these callers (compared to 63% in 2002), and they gave verbal advice on controlling heating and hot water to 71% (59% in 2002). Over two thirds of these callers were also offered a booklet on energy saving (71%).

Although more callers with Scenario A were told about possible grant schemes (48% - compared to 37% in 2002) only a few were told about EEC schemes (26% - the same as in 2002). But more callers in 2003 were offered a home visit to provide advice (23%) or a surveyor's visit to assess grant eligibility (16%).

There were still a few call handlers who seemed to see the customers' problems with "high bills" and payment difficulties not as an underlying problem of "poor energy efficiency", but as one of "poor planning and budgeting", which is why 16% of callers on this scenario were advised about alternative tariffs or ways of paying, rather than of ways of saving energy.

All in all however, energy advisers responses to this scenario have improved significantly since 2002.

Scenario B - "My home gets very cold in winter and I am elderly/have an elderly relative (aged 60+) living here/coming to live here soon. How can I make my home warmer?"

We would have expected this type of complaint to encourage more call handlers to ask questions about the homes, ages and circumstances of people in these households, so that their eligibility for Warm Front and EEC schemes could be determined in most cases.

There are again some significant improvements in the advice given since 2002. More callers are now asked detailed questions about their home and circumstances (48%) or offered a questionnaire (38%), so that some 86% could be sent a *Home Energy Report* (compared to 37% in 2002). Rather more callers were now asked about benefits received (62%, compared to 46% in 2002) or the age of the relative (55%, compared to 23% in 2002). Many were also asked about temperatures in the home (45%) and advised how best to keep warm (34%).

More of these callers were given verbal advice about measures to install (79%) but fewer were given advice on controlling heating and hot water (55%) compared with Scenario A (71%). More of these callers were offered a booklet on energy efficiency (83%) than they had been in 2002 (67%). But no more people under this scenario were told about grants (52%) or EEC schemes (21%) than was the case with some other scenarios, and rather few were offered a home visit or surveyor's visit (both 14%). Rather more were also told about alternative tariffs or repayment methods (21%) or referred to other agencies such as Warm Front/EAGA, Stay Warm, Age Concern, Help the Aged, the Scottish Executive (for heating grants), or the network of Energy Efficiency Advice Centres (34%).

Scenario C - "How can I cut down on the amount of energy I use?"

This scenario was the one which we felt most directly asked for "help to save energy", but even so a few call handlers still interpreted it partly as a plea for "help to save money", and so told 16% of callers all about alternative tariffs, dual fuel offers, or alternative metering and payment methods. Nevertheless there was a huge improvement since 2002, and this year all these callers were either asked detailed questions over the phone (50%) and/or offered a questionnaire (53%) so that all of them could get a *Home Energy Report*.

But even though these callers had asked directly for "help to save energy", rather few were asked about benefits (38%) or ages (28%) which might have helped qualify them for grants. Despite this, over half (53%) were told about any grants (compared to 37% in 2002) and 25% were told about EEC schemes. But few were offered a home visit (9%) or a surveyor's visit (6%).

Slightly fewer (than for Scenarios A or B) were given verbal advice on measures to install (69%) although many were given advice on how best to control heating and hot water (66%) and most (81%) were offered a booklet on energy efficiency.

Scenario D - “I need to buy a new washing machine (or fridge, freezer, tumble drier) and want advice on which ones use less power.”

We expected callers who called with this type of query to be told primarily about “energy labelling”, but we also hoped that some call handlers would take the opportunity to offer a more comprehensive range of energy saving advice.

Most callers were indeed given accurate verbal advice on energy labelling (85% - more than in 2002 when only 68% had this query answered), but advisers offered a leaflet on energy labelling to only 38% of callers. However 62% of callers were offered a general booklet on energy efficiency which usually included something on energy labelling. Altogether 46% of our callers felt they had been promised some printed information on energy labelling, but when the follow-up literature arrived only 15% said they had received information on energy labelling, and 8% on the Fridgesavers scheme.

Over a third of callers (38%) were asked about the state of repair of their refrigerator, and 23% were told about the Fridgesavers scheme (which provides efficient refrigerators at low cost to replace defective and inefficient older models).

In 2002 we found that very few energy advisers had used the opportunity presented by this scenario to give broader advice on energy efficiency. This year this situation has improved slightly, as 15% of callers were asked detailed questions about their home, and another 23% were offered a questionnaire; so some 38% could receive a *Home Energy Report*. But few callers were asked about benefits (8%) or age (23%) and few were given any advice on measures to install (15%) or on controlling heating and hot water (8%). But general booklets on energy efficiency were offered to 62% (compared to 37% in 2002).

Scenario E - “What grants can I get to make my home warmer and cut my bills?”

This is the most obvious request for grant information, and we would ideally expect all call handlers to explore the possibilities of obtaining an energy efficiency grant for customers who called with such a query. But we also hoped that call handlers would provide a broader range of energy efficiency advice where this seemed appropriate.

In 2002 we found that around two thirds of customers calling with this query were asked a few questions (65%) or detailed questions (3%) about their homes, and about their ages (38%) and any benefits they received (57%). On this basis 41% were then told about grants (mainly Warm Front) and 46% were told about the fuel company’s own EEC schemes, so about 8 out of 10 callers received some verbal advice on grants, although many did not receive any follow-up printed information on these schemes. Quite a few callers (22%) were also offered a home visit (in most cases a surveyor’s call) to check if the home was suitable for a grant-aided installation.

In 2003 we found that *all* customers were either asked detailed questions (42%) or offered a questionnaire (58%) so that *all* could receive a *Home Energy Report*. Most were also asked

about benefits (74%) and some about age (42%). The levels of information on which advice could be based was therefore more comprehensive in 2003. As a result 79% of callers were advised about measures to install (compared to 41% in 2002) and most were told about some grant schemes (63% - mainly Warm Front, or equivalent) but fewer than in 2002 were told about EEC schemes (26%, compared to 46% in 2002). Home visits (11%) and surveyor's visits (16%) were again offered to quite a few callers, and some were referred directly to other agencies like Warm Front (26%). Some callers were also advised on how best to control heating and hot water (42% now, 16% in 2002) and three quarters (74%) were offered a general booklet on energy efficiency (compared to 51% in 2002).

Compared to 2002, when much of the promised printed information on grants and EEC schemes did not arrive, this year we found that more information on grants and EEC schemes arrived than callers had been expecting.

Our general conclusion is that since 2002 these Energy Efficiency Helplines have significantly improved the advice they give to those seeking grants, which we hope will result in improved take-up of the schemes on offer.

Scenario F - "My home has solid walls and I find it hard to heat. What can I do?/Is there any way of insulating the walls?"

This is quite a technical question which requires some explanation of the process and cost of dry-lining, which may be enough to put off many enquirers. So the opportunity should also be taken to explore other ways in which the caller's home could be made easier to heat, without going to the expense and disruption of dry-lining.

To a great extent energy advisers do seem to tackle this scenario in this way, as 42% asked detailed questions about the home, and 33% offered a questionnaire – so three quarters of these callers should receive a *Home Energy Report*. Some were also asked about benefits (42%) but none about age; even so half were told about grants and 17% about EEC schemes which could fund other measures. Two thirds of callers (67%) were given advice on measures to install, and 42% on controlling heating and hot water.

Scenario G - "I am worried that heating my water is costing me a lot. Is it better to leave it ON all the time or to switch it ON and OFF?"

The conventional wisdom is that it is better to time the water to be "on" when people are at home and need it, and to let it cool slightly (in an insulated cylinder) when there is no demand, thereby reducing the heat loss from the cylinder. If the cylinder is uninsulated, or inadequately insulated, then the heat losses (and costs) will be huge, and switching it on and off will save more; but the inadequate insulation should really be addressed too.

Most energy advisers seemed to deal with this scenario wisely, as they asked 75% of callers about their water heating system and hot tank insulation, and 33% about their water heating controls before giving advice on how best to control it to 67% of callers. Most callers (83%) were also asked detailed questions about their home or offered a questionnaire so that a *Home Energy Report* could be prepared. They gave verbal advice on other measures to install to half the callers using this scenario, offered a general booklet on energy efficiency to 58%, and

offered home visits to one third of callers. But rather fewer callers were asked about benefits (42%) or age (25%), and only 42% were told about grants and 25% about EEC schemes.

Scenario H – “I have storage heaters which don’t seem to keep my home warm but I’ve never really understood how they work or how I should control them. Do you have anyone who could come here to show me?”

We hoped that energy advisers would respond to this request by offering a home visit (as requested) to provide advice on control. But failing this we expected them to ask about the controls, and provide advice over the phone in the first instance, and then follow this up with printed guidelines on how to use the controls. Behind this presenting problem there is also the more fundamental problem of a cold home, so any additional energy efficiency assessment of the home, and additional advice, could help solve the underlying problem.

Disappointingly only one of our callers was offered a home visit to explain their storage heater controls (by Scottish Power). Three quarters were asked about their storage heaters and the controls, and most were then advised correctly how to use those controls. But three call handlers seemed to know little about storage heaters or said they had no printed information, and instead referred callers to Energy Efficiency Advice Centres (Freephone 0800 512012) or to the NICE EIC technical helpline (0207 564 2320). This result is disappointing. But 45% of these callers did later receive some printed information on controlling storage heaters.

But most call handlers did take this opportunity to give callers some other advice. 73% of callers were however asked detailed questions on their home or offered a questionnaire to help produce a *Home Energy Report*. 45% of callers received advice on energy efficiency measures to install, but since few were asked about benefits (18%) or age (27%) only a very few were told about grants (18%) or EEC schemes (8%).

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, JAN/FEB 2002 TABLE 9A

SCENARIO	Total		Scenario A High Bills		Scenario B - Cold home/elderly relative		Scenario C - Help to save energy		Scenario D - Energy saving fridges		Scenario E - What grants available	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Major Suppliers' EEHs	235	100	46	100	57	100	57	100	38	100	37	100
RESPONSE TO ENQUIRY												
a.i.Referred to another C/H	9	4	1	2	3	5	2	4	1	3	2	5
a.ii.Referred to another number	13	6	0	0	1	2	2	4	5	13	5	14
b.i. Asked a few questions	137	58	32	70	44	77	33	58	4	11	24	65
b.ii Asked detailed questions	23	10	6	13	9	16	7	12	0	0	1	3
c. Offered to send Questionnaire about my home	51	22	10	22	12	21	16	28	6	16	7	19
d. Asked about fuel bills	33	14	18	39	3	5	8	14	1	3	3	8
e. CH accessed my bills/records	52	22	20	43	10	18	17	30	2	5	3	8
f. Asked about Benefits	89	38	15	33	26	46	18	32	9	24	21	57
g. Asked about age/anyone 60+	52	22	12	26	13	23	9	16	4	11	14	38
h. Asked about Temp. in home	52	22	13	28	24	42	11	19	1	3	3	8
i. Asked about state of fridge	24	10	6	13	2	4	6	11	9	24	1	3
j. Verbal advice on measures	121	51	29	63	42	74	31	54	4	11	15	41
k. Verbal advice on heating/HW	88	37	30	65	20	35	27	47	5	13	6	16
l. Verbal advice on cooking/refrigeration	30	13	10	22	6	11	10	18	1	3	3	8
m. How to keep warm in winter	7	3	0	0	5	9	0	0	0	0	2	5
n. Would send Booklet on Energy Efficiency	143	61	30	65	38	67	42	74	14	37	19	51
o. Sending list of sources of advice	28	12	4	9	7	12	10	18	2	5	5	14
p. Told me about grants	84	36	17	37	28	49	21	37	3	8	15	41
q. Told me about own EEC scheme	54	23	12	26	12	21	12	21	1	3	17	46
r. Told me of Fridgesavers	11	5	2	4	1	2	3	5	4	11	1	3
s. Told me about Energy Labelling	39	17	3	7	3	5	5	9	26	68	2	5
t. Told me about Tariffs/meters/ payments	23	10	7	15	3	5	11	19	2	5	0	0
u. Offered a Home Visit	17	7	4	9	4	7	1	2	0	0	8	22
v. Gave advice & referred to EEH	6	3	0	0	0	0	3	5	2	5	1	3
w. Referred me to another agency	53	23	10	22	14	25	17	30	4	11	8	22
x. Other outcomes	37	16	11	24	8	14	2	4	7	18	9	24
y. Could not help/could not suggest who might	5	2	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	5	2	5

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, SEPT 2003

TABLE 9B

SCENARIO	Total		A - High bills		B - Cold, elderly relative		C - Help to save energy		D - Energy saving appliances		E - What grants available		F- Insulating solid walls		G - Controlling hot water		H - Visit re storage heaters	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Energy Efficiency Helplines	159	100	31	100	29	100	32	100	13	100	19	100	12	100	12	100	11	100
RESPONSE TO ENQUIRY																		
a.Referred to: another C/H	4	3	1	3	1	3	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	1	9
a. Referred to another number	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	9
b.i. Asked a few questions	72	45	17	55	12	41	15	47	4	31	10	53	6	50	4	33	4	36
b.ii Asked detailed questions	65	41	14	45	14	48	16	50	2	15	8	42	5	42	4	33	2	18
b.iii Asked about water heating/tank ins.	80	50	21	68	11	38	19	59	3	23	9	47	5	42	9	75	3	27
b.iv Asked about hot water controls	65	41	14	45	11	38	18	56	1	8	8	42	5	42	4	33	4	36
b.v Asked about storage heater age/controls	23	14	3	10	3	10	4	13	0	0	4	21	0	0	1	8	8	73
c. Offered to send Q'naire about my home	70	44	14	45	11	38	17	53	3	23	11	58	4	33	6	50	4	36
d. Asked about fuel bills	29	18	12	39	5	17	9	28	0	0	0	0	2	17	1	8	0	0
e. CH accessed my bills/records	33	21	13	42	2	7	12	38	2	15	1	5	1	8	0	0	2	18
f. Asked about Benefits	74	47	17	55	18	62	12	38	1	8	14	74	5	42	5	42	2	18
g. Asked about age/anyone 60+	55	35	13	42	16	55	9	28	3	23	8	42	0	0	3	25	3	27
h. Asked about Temp. in home	43	27	9	29	13	45	8	25	0	0	4	21	4	33	3	25	2	18
i. Asked about state of fridge	28	18	9	29	4	14	6	19	5	38	2	11	0	0	1	8	1	9
j. Verbal advice on measures	105	66	24	77	23	79	22	69	2	15	15	79	8	67	6	50	5	45
k. Verbal advice on heating/HW	86	54	22	71	16	55	21	66	1	8	8	42	5	42	8	67	5	45
l. Verbal advice on cooking/refrigeration	29	18	9	29	4	14	9	28	1	8	2	11	1	8	2	17	1	9
m. How to keep warm in winter	18	11	4	13	10	34	3	9	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
n. Would send Booklet on Energy Efficiency	116	73	22	71	24	83	26	81	8	62	14	74	9	75	7	58	6	55
o. Sending list of sources of advice	52	33	11	35	11	38	8	25	3	23	9	47	5	42	2	17	3	27
p.i Told me about grants	76	48	15	48	15	52	17	53	4	31	12	63	6	50	5	42	2	18
p.ii Told process/timescale unasked	7	4	1	3	1	3	2	6	0	0	1	5	1	8	1	8	0	0
q.i Told me about own EEC scheme	34	21	8	26	6	21	8	25	1	8	5	26	2	17	3	25	1	9
q.ii Told process/timescale unasked	4	3	2	6	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	8	0	0
r. Told me of Fridgesavers	4	3	1	3	0	0	0	0	3	23	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
s.i Told me about Energy Labelling	29	18	3	10	3	10	7	22	11	85	3	16	0	0	1	8	1	9
s.ii Offered Energy Labelling leaflet	12	8	1	3	2	7	3	9	5	38	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
t. Told me about Tariffs/meters/ payments	21	13	5	16	6	21	5	16	0	0	1	5	0	0	1	8	3	27
u.i Offered a Home Visit to give advice	23	14	7	23	4	14	3	9	1	8	2	11	1	8	4	33	1	9
u.ii Offered Surveyor visit re grant eligibility	15	9	5	16	4	14	2	6	0	0	3	16	0	0	1	8	0	0
v. Gave advice & referred to EEH	2	1	1	3	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
w. Referred me to another agency	34	21	5	16	10	34	6	19	2	15	5	26	0	0	3	25	3	27
x. Other outcomes	29	18	4	13	7	24	5	16	4	31	4	21	0	0	3	25	2	18
y. Could not help or suggest who might	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, JAN/FEB 2002

TABLE 10A

SCENARIO	Total		Scenario A - High Bills		Scenario B - Cold home/elderly relative		Scenario C - Help to save energy		Scenario D - Energy saving fridges		Scenario E - What grants available	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Major Suppliers' EEHs	235	100	46	100	57	100	57	100	38	100	37	100
MEASURES RECOMMENDED												
Loft Insulation	48	20	10	22	19	33	12	21	0	0	7	19
Cavity wall insulation	44	19	9	20	16	28	11	19	2	5	6	16
Draughtproofing	31	13	6	13	14	25	7	12	0	0	4	11
TRVs	18	8	4	9	8	14	5	9	0	0	1	3
CFLs	40	17	18	39	9	16	8	14	2	5	3	8
Double glazing	13	6	2	4	5	9	3	5	0	0	3	8
Radiators shelves	12	5	3	7	4	7	4	7	0	0	1	3
Radiator foil/reflectors	16	7	4	9	5	9	6	11	0	0	1	3
New shower	1	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New boiler	2	1	2	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New condensing boiler	13	6	1	2	5	9	3	5	1	3	3	8
Insulation (unspecified)	6	3	1	2	2	4	1	2	2	5	0	0
Floor insulation	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0
Hot tank insulation	11	5	3	7	2	4	5	9	0	0	1	3
Hot water timer	2	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	1	3	0	0
Hot water thermostat	2	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0
Pipe insulation	3	1	1	2	1	2	1	2	0	0	0	0
Room thermostat	2	1	1	2	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0
Thicker curtains	4	2	0	0	2	4	1	2	0	0	1	3
Storage Heaters/oil filled radiators	5	2	0	0	2	4	2	4	1	3	0	0
Central heating	3	1	0	0	1	2	1	2	0	0	1	3
Central heating timer	4	2	2	4	1	2	0	0	1	3	0	0
Dehumidifier	1	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
"A" rated appliances	2	1	0	0	1	2	1	2	0	0	0	0

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, SEPT 2003

TABLE 10B

SCENARIO	Total		A - High bills		B - Cold home/ elderly relative		C - Help to save energy		D - Energy saving appliances		E - What grants available		F- Insulating solid walls		G - Controlling hot water		H - Visit to explain storage heaters	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Energy Efficiency Helplines	159	100	31	100	29	100	32	100	13	100	19	100	12	100	12	100	11	100
MEASURES RECOMMENDED																		
Loft Insulation	52	33	14	45	13	45	7	22	0	0	6	32	6	50	2	17	4	36
Cavity wall insulation	43	27	11	35	11	38	10	31	0	0	7	37	2	17	1	8	1	9
Solid wall insulation	7	4	0	0	4	14	1	3	0	0	0	0	2	17	0	0	0	0
Draughtproofing	27	17	6	19	6	21	4	13	0	0	4	21	1	8	2	17	4	36
TRVs	18	11	3	10	5	17	6	19	0	0	3	16	0	0	1	8	0	0
CFLs	41	26	15	48	6	21	8	25	0	0	7	37	2	17	1	8	2	18
Double glazing	15	9	1	3	5	17	4	13	0	0	1	5	1	8	2	17	1	9
Radiators shelves	7	4	0	0	3	10	2	6	0	0	1	5	1	8	0	0	0	0
Radiator foil/reflectors	17	11	4	13	4	14	7	22	0	0	1	5	1	8	0	0	0	0
New shower	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New boiler	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
New condensing boiler	10	6	1	3	3	10	3	9	1	8	2	11	0	0	0	0	0	0
Insulation (unspecified)	4	3	1	3	2	7	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Floor insulation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hot tank insulation	9	6	1	3	3	10	3	9	0	0	2	11	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hot water timer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hot water thermostat	1	1	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pipe insulation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Room thermostat	4	3	1	3	1	3	1	3	0	0	0	0	1	8	0	0	0	0
Thicker curtains	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Storage Heaters/oil filled radiators	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Central heating	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Central heating timer	5	3	0	0	1	3	3	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	8	0	0
Dehumidifier	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
"A" rated appliances	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, JAN/FEB 2002
TABLE 11A

SCENARIO	Total		Scenario A - High Bills		Scenario B - Cold home/elderly relative		Scenario C - Help to save energy		Scenario D - Energy saving fridges		Scenario E - What grants available	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Major Suppliers' EEHs	235	100	46	100	57	100	57	100	38	100	37	100
GRANT INFORMATION												
No. asking for more details of Grants	115	49	23	50	33	58	26	46	6	16	27	73
CH gave Name of scheme	55	23	14	30	16	28	10	18	3	8	12	32
CH said what scheme covered	45	19	10	22	10	18	9	16	3	8	13	35
CH told caller how to apply	86	37	16	35	27	47	17	30	4	11	22	59
CH knew how long to install	30	13	7	15	9	16	6	11	1	3	7	19
CH knew cost to customer	67	29	13	28	20	35	10	18	4	11	20	54
CH knew likely savings	56	24	11	24	20	35	12	21	3	8	10	27

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, SEPT 2003
TABLE 11B

SCENARIO	Total		A - High bills		B - Cold home/elderly relative		C - Help to save energy		D - Energy saving appliances		E - What grants available		F - Insulating solid walls		G - Controlling hot water		H - Visit to explain storage heaters	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Energy Efficiency Helplines	159	100	31	100	29	100	32	100	13	100	19	100	12	100	12	100	11	100
GRANT INFORMATION																		
No. asking for more details of Grants	45	28	11	35	10	34	7	22	1	8	10	53	1	8	3	25	2	18
CH gave Name of scheme	26	16	5	16	7	24	4	13	1	8	6	32	0	0	1	8	2	18
CH said what scheme covered	12	8	5	16	1	3	3	9	0	0	1	5	1	8	1	8	0	0
CH told caller how to apply	27	17	5	16	6	21	5	16	0	0	6	32	1	8	2	17	2	18
CH knew how long to install	10	6	2	6	3	10	0	0	0	0	2	11	1	8	0	0	2	18
CH knew cost to customer	21	13	5	16	4	14	5	16	0	0	2	11	1	8	2	17	2	18
CH knew likely savings	15	9	3	10	5	17	1	3	0	0	3	16	1	8	2	17	0	0

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, JAN/FEB 2002
TABLE 12A

SCENARIO	Total		Scenario A - High Bills		Scenario B - Cold home/elderly relative		Scenario C - Help to save energy		Scenario D - Energy saving fridges		Scenario E - What grants available	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Major Suppliers' EEHs	235	100	46	100	57	100	57	100	38	100	37	100
INFORMATION DUE TO BE SENT BY POST												
Questionnaire/Home Energy Check	48	20	9	20	12	21	14	25	7	18	6	16
Report on measures to install	8	3	0	0	1	2	6	11	0	0	1	3
Booklet on energy saving	191	81	40	87	49	86	49	86	26	68	27	73
List of other sources of advice	25	11	2	4	6	11	10	18	3	8	4	11
Information on Grants	43	18	8	17	14	25	5	9	6	16	10	27
Info. on company's EEC scheme	21	9	5	11	7	12	1	2	3	8	5	14
Fridgesavers information	8	3	0	0	0	0	2	4	6	16	0	0
Information on Energy Labelling	17	7	1	2	2	4	3	5	11	29	0	0
Information on Tariffs	8	3	2	4	1	2	4	7	1	3	0	0
Information on Condensing Boilers	35	15	7	15	11	19	9	16	5	13	3	8
Information on CFLs	52	22	7	15	18	32	10	18	9	24	8	22
Info. on Priority Service Register	4	2	0	0	3	5	0	0	1	3	0	0
Other items	19	8	5	11	5	9	3	5	2	5	4	11

NUMBER RECEIVING INFORMATION BY POST												
Questionnaire/Home Energy Check	48	20	12	26	7	12	13	23	9	24	7	19
Report on measures to install	26	11	7	15	7	12	5	9	4	11	3	8
Booklet on energy saving	146	62	33	72	38	67	38	67	19	50	18	49
List of other sources of advice	12	5	3	7	5	9	3	5	1	3	0	0
Information on Grants	40	17	7	15	12	21	7	12	8	21	6	16
Info. on company's EEC scheme	24	10	3	7	6	11	7	12	4	11	4	11
Fridgesavers information	12	5	0	0	1	2	3	5	6	16	2	5
Information on Energy Labelling	22	9	3	7	4	7	7	12	7	18	1	3
Information on Tariffs	9	4	2	4	0	0	4	7	1	3	2	5
Information on Condensing Boilers	26	11	8	17	6	11	4	7	4	11	4	11
Information on CFLs	63	27	6	13	22	39	16	28	13	34	6	16
Info. on Priority Service Register	5	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	5	0	0
Other items	72	31	19	41	16	28	14	25	10	26	13	35
No Information sent (excl. HEC)	69	29	12	26	12	21	14	25	17	45	14	38
AVERAGE NO. OF PUBLICATIONS SENT (excl HEC & Report)	2.8	n/a	2.8	n/a	3.3	n/a	2.5	n/a	3.1	n/a	2.5	n/a

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, SEPT 2003

TABLE 12B

SCENARIO	Total		A - High bills		B - Cold home/ elderly relative		C - Help to save energy		D - Energy saving appliances		E - What grants available		F- Insulating solid walls		G - Controlling hot water		H - Visit to explain storage heaters	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Energy Efficiency Helplines	159	100	31	100	29	100	32	100	13	100	19	100	12	100	12	100	11	100
INFORMATION DUE TO BE SENT BY POST																		
Questionnaire/Home Energy Check	74	47	14	45	12	41	15	47	7	54	11	58	6	50	5	42	4	36
Report on measures to install	52	33	15	48	9	31	9	28	5	38	3	16	7	58	3	25	1	9
Booklet on energy saving	144	91	29	94	25	86	29	91	12	92	16	84	12	100	14	117	7	64
List of other sources of advice	49	31	15	48	8	28	9	28	2	15	5	26	5	42	3	25	2	18
Information on Grants	46	29	13	42	9	31	6	19	3	23	4	21	3	25	5	42	3	27
Info. on company's EEC scheme	14	9	3	10	2	7	0	0	1	8	1	5	3	25	2	17	2	18
Fridgesavers information	1	1	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Information on Energy Labelling	11	7	0	0	2	7	2	6	6	46	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	9
Information on Tariffs	4	3	1	3	0	0	2	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	9
Information on Condensing Boilers	12	8	1	3	3	10	3	9	1	8	3	16	1	8	0	0	0	0
Information on CFLs	42	26	8	26	7	24	11	34	3	23	6	32	2	17	2	17	3	27
Info. on Priority Service Register	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other items	18	11	5	16	3	10	4	13	1	8	1	5	1	8	1	8	2	18

NUMBER RECEIVING INFORMATION BY POST																		
Questionnaire/Home Energy Check	82	52	16	52	13	45	16	50	7	54	11	58	7	58	7	58	5	45
Report on measures to install	66	42	13	42	15	52	17	53	4	31	8	42	4	33	3	25	2	18
Booklet on energy saving	126	79	26	84	21	72	24	75	11	85	16	84	11	92	11	92	6	55
List of other sources of advice	27	17	11	35	3	10	6	19	1	8	3	16	1	8	2	17	0	0
Information on Grants	45	28	8	26	10	34	7	22	4	31	5	26	6	50	2	17	3	27
Info. on company's EEC scheme	36	23	9	29	7	24	7	22	3	23	3	16	3	25	1	8	3	27
Fridgesavers information	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Information on Energy Labelling	23	14	5	16	5	17	6	19	2	15	3	16	0	0	1	8	1	9
Information on Tariffs	16	10	5	16	1	3	3	9	1	8	2	11	1	8	0	0	3	27
Information on Condensing Boilers	22	14	5	16	5	17	6	19	1	8	1	5	2	17	1	8	1	9
Information on CFLs	60	38	13	42	12	41	12	38	1	8	6	32	7	58	5	42	4	36
Info. on Priority Service Register	4	3	0	0	1	3	1	3	0	0	1	5	1	8	0	0	0	0
Info on controlling storage heaters	10	6	1	3	1	3	0	0	0	0	1	5	1	8	1	8	5	45
Other items	76	48	17	55	14	48	16	50	4	31	5	26	6	50	8	67	6	55
No Information sent (excl. HEC)	24	15	4	13	4	14	5	16	2	15	3	16	1	8	1	8	4	36
AVERAGE NO. OF PUBLICATIONS SENT (excl HEC & Report)	3.6	n/a	3.2	n/a	3.7	n/a	3.4	n/a	3.3	n/a	3.5	n/a	5.2	n/a	3.6	n/a	2.7	n/a

Responses to the customers' queries – by each company's helpline

In this section we again explore responses to our callers' queries, but this time looking at the responses of *each company's helpline* in turn. We do not attempt to explore responses *by each company to each scenario* in the tables, as the bases are too small for comparisons to be meaningful. Results are shown in full in Tables 13-22 in this section.

There are noticeable differences in the ways in which these Energy Efficiency Helplines responded to our mystery shoppers' queries.

British Gas

The British Gas Energy Efficiency Helpline responded better in 2003 than it did in 2002 to most of our mystery shoppers' enquiries. The proportion of customers being asked detailed questions about their homes or being offered a questionnaire so that a *Home Energy* Report could be produced, rose from 18% in 2002 to 62% in 2003.

However there was only a slight increase in the numbers of callers being asked about benefits (53%) or age (23%), although British Gas asked more often about benefits than any other company. But British Gas now seem to ask fewer callers than in 2002 about their fuel bills and they access these records less.

Having learned something about the customers who were calling, British Gas gave verbal advice on measures to install to 65% of callers (compared to 74% in 2002). They gave advice on controlling heating and hot water to 69% (70% in 2002). British Gas continue to give more customers advice on heating and hot water control than do other companies.

British Gas also gave more callers information about their own EEC schemes (35%) than other companies, and they also offered 35% of callers information about other grants (rather fewer than most other companies).

Printed advice from British Gas has also improved. In 2002 they offered a booklet on energy efficiency to only 48% of callers: this rose to 73% in 2003. But not all of those who were promised a booklet (88%) did later receive it (73%) nor did all those promised a list of other sources (38%) actually receive it (23%). But rather more British Gas customers did receive a Home Energy Check questionnaire (69%) than had expected one (46%), and more callers received information on grants (12%) and EEC schemes (23%) than had expected it.

27% of callers to British Gas received no follow-up information at all; but at least this was an improvement on 2002 when 37% received no printed information.

EDF Energy

EDF Energy now seems to ask all callers detailed questions about their home (41%) and/or send them a questionnaire (74%). In 2002 about 78% of callers were offered this service. Perhaps because benefits and age are covered in this questionnaire, they actually asked fewer people about benefits in 2003 (48%) than they did in 2002 (57%).

This helpline gave verbal advice to 74% of callers on measures to install (compared to 57% in 2002) and it gave advice on heating and hot water control to 52% of callers (30% in 2002). The numbers being told about grants (41%) and EEC schemes (30%) were similar to 2002.

The number of callers spontaneously offered a booklet on energy efficiency in 2003 (74%) was slightly lower than the 2002 figure (87%). But in the end 96% of callers were promised a booklet on energy efficiency (some after asking for one) and all 96% received this, but only 11% received a list of other sources of advice. Most of those promised a questionnaire received one, and 70% of callers received a *Home Energy Report* - a higher proportion than for any other company. Fewer callers received information on grants (33%) than they had in 2002 (43%) but the same number received information on EEC schemes (22%). On the whole EDF Energy now seems better at providing the promised follow-up information than it was a year ago, and if anything its standards of advice provision have improved .

npower

In 2002 npower's three companies (npower, Yorkshire and Northern) were evaluated separately. This year the npower group was evaluated as a single entity.

npower's energy advisers now seem either to ask callers detailed questions about their homes (36%) or to offer them a questionnaire (52%) so that around 88% should receive a *Home Energy Report*. The numbers asked about benefits (48%) or age (28%) are about average, and these questions should really be asked of more callers. As a result rather few callers to npower are told about grants (32%) or EEC schemes (12%) – slightly fewer than received such information in 2002.

Fewer than half the callers received any verbal advice on measures to install (48% - compared to 50% in 2002) and 40% were given any verbal advice on how best to control heating and hot water (30% in 2002). But over three quarters of callers this year (76%) were offered a booklet on energy efficiency, compared to half last year.

Last year npower had some slight weaknesses in following-up calls with printed materials, one or two of which are still apparent in 2003: although 92% of callers were promised a booklet on energy efficiency (some after they had specifically asked for it) only 76% actually received one; and 60% expected a *Home Energy Report* but only 28% received one. But on the other hand more callers received information on CFLs (60%), grants (40%), EEC schemes (44%), condensing boilers (32%), tariffs (20%) and storage heater controls (20%) than had expected these. Altogether npower send out 49% more printed information than callers had expected. But even so, 24% of callers received no printed information at all (compared to 25% in 2002) so some improvements are still needed here.

Powergen

Since 2002 when Powergen hardly used *Home Energy Reports*, it has clearly moved into using them in a big way: 67% of callers were asked the detailed energy audit questions on the phone, and another 21% were offered a questionnaire. Powergen were also one of the more thorough companies in asking many callers about benefits (50%) or age (54%) and temperatures in the home (54%).

But despite these extra questions asked of callers, in 2003 Powergen actually advised marginally fewer customers about measures to install (58%) than Powergen itself had in 2002 (61%). It did however advise many customers about how best to control their heating and hot water (67% - more than it had in 2002: 48%). Powergen also advised a similar proportion of customers about grants in 2003 (42%) as it had in 2002 (43%) but only about half as many about EEC schemes (17%) as last year (35%).

Powergen may also have cut back on its home visits: last year it offered 30% of callers a home visit (more than any other company) but this year only 17% of callers were offered this service.

In terms of literature promised and delivered, Powergen was quite good but still patchy. No-one received a questionnaire by post, and a few people promised booklets did not receive them. Most people promised lists of other sources of advice did not receive one. But almost all those promised *Home Energy Reports* received them (50% compared to 54% promised one) and Powergen delivered more information on grants (46%) and CFLs (33%) than callers had expected. 17% of callers received no information at all (the same for Powergen callers in 2002).

Scottish & Southern

In 2002 Scottish & Southern seemed to be one of the leading companies in the use of detailed questions and home energy audit questionnaires to establish the most appropriate measures to advise customers to install. Now they seem to have fallen behind other companies in that respect. Although 40% of callers were asked detailed questions, only another 12% were offered a questionnaire, so no more than 52% of callers could have been provided with a *Home Energy Report*. But in practice only 32% of callers expected to receive one, and only 24% actually received one – the lowest proportion of all the major suppliers.

Above average proportions of callers were asked about benefits (52%) and age (48%), and more customers were given verbal advice about measures to install (80%) than by any other company. Many were also told about grants (56%) and EEC schemes (24%) and more were offered a home visit (24%) than by any other company.

But fewer customers were offered a booklet on energy efficiency (56%) than by other companies, although 84% were promised one after more of them asked for this. However only 64% received a general booklet – the lowest for any company. Scottish & Southern were also poor at sending promised information on grants and EEC schemes, and 16% of callers received no printed information at all.

Scottish Power

In 2002 there was a certain amount of confusion when our callers tried to call the Scottish Power Energy Efficiency Helpline, and a few were referred to other internal lines or the grants helpline (30%). This confusion now seems to have been resolved and the standards of advice have been improved.

Scottish Power now asks detailed questions of 29% of callers, and offers another 79% a questionnaire to complete at home, so most callers could get *Home Energy Reports*. But only 39% of callers actually received their *Home Energy Report*.

Energy advisers are still asking rather too few callers about benefits (29%) or age (25%), although this is an improvement on last year when only 5% were asked each of these questions. But nevertheless there has been a big improvement in the numbers of callers given advice on measures to install – up from 25% in 2002 to 68% now – and on how to control heating and hot water – up from 15% to 57%.

In 2002 Scottish Power was one of the poorest companies at providing printed information to back up its advice. (The other was its sister company Manweb.) This situation has now also improved. Most of those promised a booklet (96%) received one (89%) although few received a list of other sources of help (18%). Information on grants reached 32% of callers (64% were expecting some) but information on EEC reached 43% (when only 7% expected some) so there may be some confusion about these in callers' minds. Many more callers also received information on CFLs (89% - the highest of all companies) than had been expecting this (61%).

In 2002 around two thirds of Scottish Power and Manweb callers received no information at all; this proportion has now dropped to 7%, which is a huge improvement.

Atlantic

Atlantic is a small supplier, and so only four calls were made to its Energy Efficiency Helpline. All callers were asked some questions about their homes, but only one was asked about benefits and three about age before some verbal advice was given. Three callers were advised about measures to install and possible grants, and two were advised on controlling the heating and hot water and told about energy labelling. All four were also referred to EEACs or the Energy Saving Trust. The only information all four callers were sent was a general booklet on energy efficiency. This is quite a satisfactory performance for a small company, and a better performance than Atlantic achieved last year (as far as we can judge from the two calls made then).

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, JAN/FEB 2002

TABLE 13A

FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	Total		British Gas		London/ SWEB Grp		npower		Yorkshire		Northern		Powergen		Scottish & Southern		Scottish Power		Manweb		SEEBOARD		TXU Energi (East/Norweb)	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Major Suppliers	235	100	27	100	23	100	20	100	9	100	20	100	23	100	29	100	20	100	18	100	23	100	23	100
RESPONSE TO ENQUIRY																								
a.Referred to another Call Handler	9	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	7	2	10	2	11	1	4	2	9
a.Referred to another number	13	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	20	3	17	0	0	6	26	
b.i. Asked a few questions	137	58	21	78	11	48	13	65	7	78	13	65	15	65	17	59	5	25	6	33	17	74	12	52
b.ii Asked detailed questions	23	10	2	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	10	4	17	9	31	3	15	0	0	2	9	1	4
c. Offered to send Questionnaire about my home	51	22	3	11	18	78	3	15	0	0	12	60	0	0	8	28	2	10	3	17	2	9	0	0
d. Asked about fuel bills	33	14	6	22	1	4	2	10	1	11	2	10	4	17	5	17	2	10	2	11	6	26	2	9
e. CH accessed my bills/records	52	22	15	56	6	26	2	10	0	0	0	0	6	26	10	34	2	10	0	0	6	26	5	22
f. Asked about Benefits	89	38	13	48	13	57	7	35	3	33	13	65	14	61	6	21	1	5	0	0	11	48	8	35
g. Asked about age/anyone 60+	52	22	8	30	4	17	3	15	0	0	6	30	9	39	5	17	1	5	2	11	7	30	7	30
h. Asked about Temp. in home	52	22	13	48	0	0	3	15	4	44	3	15	9	39	8	28	2	10	0	0	5	22	5	22
i. Asked about state of fridge	24	10	3	11	2	9	2	10	1	11	4	20	1	4	8	28	0	0	0	0	1	4	2	9
j. Verbal advice on measures	121	51	20	74	13	57	10	50	3	33	11	55	14	61	19	66	5	25	2	11	14	61	10	43
k. Verbal advice on heating/HW	88	37	19	70	7	30	6	30	6	67	5	25	11	48	13	45	3	15	3	17	9	39	6	26
l. Verbal advice on cooking/refrig.	30	13	8	30	3	13	2	10	1	11	1	5	3	13	5	17	2	10	0	0	1	4	4	17
m. How to keep warm in winter	7	3	2	7	1	4	1	5	0	0	0	0	1	4	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4
n. Would send Booklet on En.Eff.	143	61	13	48	20	87	10	50	8	89	7	35	14	61	23	79	12	60	9	50	17	74	10	43
o. Sending list of sources of advice	28	12	2	7	4	17	2	10	1	11	2	10	4	17	7	24	2	10	0	0	3	13	1	4
p. Told me about grants	84	36	8	30	10	43	10	50	2	22	7	35	10	43	8	28	4	20	1	6	14	61	10	43
q. Told me about own EEC scheme	54	23	11	41	5	22	6	30	2	22	5	25	8	35	7	24	0	0	2	11	5	22	3	13
r. Told me of Fridgesavers	11	5	0	0	3	13	1	5	0	0	1	5	1	4	3	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	9
s. Told me about Energy Labelling	39	17	5	19	6	26	4	20	0	0	3	15	4	17	6	21	1	5	1	6	5	22	4	17
t. Told me about Tariffs/meters/ payments	23	10	3	11	1	4	2	10	0	0	2	10	1	4	2	7	1	5	0	0	6	26	5	22
u. Offered a Home Visit	17	7	2	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	30	5	17	2	10	0	0	1	4	0	0
v. Gave advice & referred to EEH	6	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	13	1	3	0	0	1	6	0	0	1	4
w. Referred me to another agency	53	23	5	19	11	48	4	20	1	11	4	20	4	17	9	31	3	15	3	17	3	13	6	26
x. Other outcomes	37	16	4	15	3	13	1	5	1	11	1	5	3	13	3	10	5	25	8	44	3	13	5	22
y. Could not help/could not suggest who might	5	2	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	3	17	0	0	0	0

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, SEPT 2003

TABLE 13B

MAJOR FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	ALL		British Gas		EDF Energy		npower		Powergen/ TXU		Scottish & Southern		Scottish Power		Atlantic	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Energy Efficiency Helplines	159	100	26	100	27	100	25	100	24	100	25	100	28	100	4	100
RESPONSE TO ENQUIRY																
a.Referred to: another Call Handler	4	3	3	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	25
a. Referred to another number	1	1	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
b.i. Asked a few questions	72	45	12	46	13	48	13	52	5	21	12	48	14	50	3	75
b.ii Asked detailed questions	65	41	9	35	11	41	9	36	16	67	10	40	8	29	2	50
b.iii Asked about water heating/tank insulation	80	50	15	58	11	41	9	36	16	67	17	68	10	36	2	50
b.iv Asked about controls on hot water system	65	41	13	50	12	44	3	12	15	63	13	52	8	29	1	25
b.v Asked about age of storage heaters/controls	23	14	4	15	5	19	2	8	5	21	4	16	2	7	1	25
c. Offered to send Questionnaire about my home	70	44	7	27	20	74	13	52	5	21	3	12	22	79	0	0
d. Asked about fuel bills	29	18	5	19	2	7	6	24	4	17	3	12	8	29	1	25
e. CH accessed my bills/records	33	21	7	27	5	19	2	8	7	29	10	40	2	7	0	0
f. Asked about Benefits	74	47	15	58	13	48	12	48	12	50	13	52	8	29	1	25
g. Asked about age/anyone 60+	55	35	6	23	7	26	7	28	13	54	12	48	7	25	3	75
h. Asked about Temp. in home	43	27	7	27	4	15	6	24	13	54	6	24	6	21	1	25
i. Asked about state of fridge	28	18	1	4	8	30	3	12	8	33	6	24	1	4	1	25
j. Verbal advice on measures	105	66	17	65	20	74	12	48	14	58	20	80	19	68	3	75
k. Verbal advice on heating/HW	86	54	18	69	14	52	10	40	16	67	10	40	16	57	2	50
l. Verbal advice on cooking/refrigeration	29	18	8	31	2	7	2	8	8	33	4	16	5	18	0	0
m. How to keep warm in winter	18	11	4	15	2	7	3	12	2	8	5	20	2	7	0	0
n. Would send Booklet on Energy Efficiency	116	73	19	73	20	74	19	76	17	71	14	56	24	86	3	75
o. Sending list of sources of advice	52	33	8	31	4	15	11	44	8	33	8	32	13	46	0	0
p.i Told me about grants	76	48	9	35	11	41	8	32	10	42	14	56	21	75	3	75
p.ii Told process/timescale without me asking	7	4	0	0	2	7	1	4	1	4	0	0	2	7	1	25
q.i Told me about own EEC scheme	34	21	9	35	8	30	3	12	4	17	6	24	4	14	0	0
q.ii Told process/timescale without me asking	4	3	2	8	1	4	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
r. Told me of Fridgesavers	4	3	2	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	8	0	0	0	0
s.i Told me about Energy Labelling	29	18	1	4	9	33	4	16	3	13	8	32	2	7	2	50
s.ii Offered Energy Labelling leaflet	12	8	0	0	3	11	2	8	1	4	3	12	2	7	1	25
t. Told me about Tariffs/meters/ payments	21	13	5	19	5	19	1	4	3	13	4	16	2	7	1	25
u.i Offered a Home Visit to give advice	23	14	4	15	4	15	3	12	4	17	6	24	2	7	0	0
u.ii Offered Surveyor visit re grant eligibility	15	9	0	0	3	11	2	8	2	8	5	20	3	11	0	0
v. Gave advice & referred to EEH	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	4	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
w. Referred me to another agency	34	21	8	31	4	15	3	12	6	25	6	24	3	11	4	100
x. Other outcomes	29	18	6	23	3	11	4	16	3	13	5	20	5	18	3	75
y. Could not help/could not suggest who might	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, JAN/FEB 2002

TABLE 14A

FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	Total		British Gas		London/ SWEB Grp		npower		Yorkshire		Northern		Powergen		Scottish & Southern		Scottish Power		Manweb		SEEBOARD		TXU Energi (East/Norweb)	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Major Suppliers	235	100	27	100	23	100	20	100	9	100	20	100	23	100	29	100	20	100	18	100	23	100	23	100
INFORMATION DUE TO BE SENT BY POST																								
Questionnaire/Home Energy Check	48	20	3	11	19	83	3	15	0	0	12	60	0	0	4	14	2	10	3	17	2	9	0	0
Report on measures to install	8	3	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	10	4	20	0	0	0	0	0	0
Booklet on energy saving	191	81	23	85	22	96	18	90	9	100	18	90	20	87	28	97	7	35	10	56	19	83	17	74
List of other sources of advice	25	11	3	11	4	17	1	5	1	11	2	10	4	17	5	17	0	0	0	0	3	13	2	9
Information on Grants	43	18	1	4	7	30	6	30	2	22	5	25	5	22	2	7	1	5	0	0	13	57	1	4
Info. on company's EEC scheme	21	9	1	4	3	13	3	15	0	0	3	15	5	22	2	7	0	0	1	6	2	9	1	4
Fridgesavers information	7	3	0	0	2	9	1	5	0	0	1	5	0	0	2	7	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Information on Energy Labelling	17	7	1	4	4	17	1	5	0	0	2	10	1	4	3	10	1	5	0	0	2	9	2	9
Information on Tariffs	8	3	2	7	0	0	1	5	0	0	2	10	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	1	4	1	4
Information on Condensing Boilers	35	15	3	11	1	4	9	45	2	22	3	15	6	26	4	14	1	5	3	17	3	13	0	0
Information on CFLs	52	22	3	11	10	43	6	30	5	56	2	10	4	17	12	41	2	10	4	22	3	13	1	4
Info. on Priority Service Register	4	2	0	0	3	13	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other items	19	8	2	7	1	4	4	20	1	11	0	0	3	13	3	10	3	15	1	6	1	4	0	0

NUMBER RECEIVING INFORMATION BY POST																								
Questionnaire/Home Energy Check	48	20	2	7	13	57	10	50	5	56	8	40	0	0	2	7	2	10	2	11	0	0	4	17
Report on measures to install	26	11	1	4	9	39	3	15	2	22	5	25	0	0	3	10	1	5	1	6	0	0	1	4
Booklet on energy saving	146	62	17	63	20	87	14	70	7	78	13	65	16	70	21	72	5	25	4	22	19	83	10	43
List of other sources of advice	12	5	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	2	9	5	17	0	0	0	0	3	13	0	0
Information on Grants	40	17	0	0	3	13	7	35	2	22	6	30	6	26	2	7	1	5	1	6	9	39	3	13
Info. on company's EEC scheme	24	10	1	4	0	0	4	20	1	11	6	30	8	35	1	3	0	0	0	0	2	9	1	4
Fridgesavers information	12	5	0	0	2	9	3	15	1	11	1	5	0	0	4	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4
Information on Energy Labelling	22	9	0	0	6	26	1	5	0	0	2	10	0	0	11	38	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	9
Information on Tariffs	9	4	1	4	0	0	2	10	0	0	1	5	0	0	2	7	1	5	0	0	1	4	1	4
Information on Condensing Boilers	26	11	1	4	0	0	5	25	2	22	5	25	5	22	2	7	1	5	2	11	2	9	1	4
Information on CFLs	63	27	1	4	10	43	9	45	5	56	7	35	6	26	15	52	2	10	3	17	2	9	3	13
Info. on Priority Service Register	5	2	0	0	3	13	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other items	72	31	9	33	7	30	7	35	4	44	10	50	6	26	8	28	2	10	3	17	7	30	9	39
No Information sent (excl. HEC)	69	29	10	37	4	17	5	25	2	22	3	15	4	17	6	21	13	65	12	67	2	9	8	35
AVERAGE NO. OF PUBLICATIONS SENT (excl HEC & Report)	2.8	n/a	2.0	n/a	2.4	n/a	6.3	n/a	5.6	n/a	4.2	n/a	3.6	n/a	2.9	n/a	0.7	n/a	0.7	n/a	2.1	n/a	2.5	n/a
% PROMISED INFO SENT		106		81		96		122		145		127		102		112		68		73		92		144
DAYS AFTER CALL ITEMS RECEIVED	1 to 17	n/a	2 to 7	n/a	1 to 16	n/a	1 to 8	n/a	2 to 12	n/a	1 to 3	n/a	2 to 15	n/a	1 to 14	n/a	1 to 6	n/a	1 to 17	n/a	1 to 10	n/a	2 to 11	n/a

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, SEPT 2003
TABLE 14B

MAJOR FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	ALL		British Gas		EDF Energy		npower		Powergen/ TXU		Scottish & Southern		Scottish Power		Atlantic	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Energy Efficiency Helplines	159	100	26	100	27	100	25	100	24	100	25	100	28	100	4	100
INFORMATION DUE TO BE SENT BY POST																
Questionnaire/Home Energy Check	74	47	12	46	20	74	15	60	2	8	3	12	22	79	0	0
Report on measures to install	52	33	6	23	12	44	8	32	13	54	8	32	5	18	0	0
Booklet on energy saving	144	91	23	88	26	96	23	92	20	83	21	84	27	96	4	100
List of other sources of advice	49	31	10	38	9	33	6	24	6	25	5	20	13	46	0	0
Information on Grants	46	29	2	8	10	37	6	24	5	21	5	20	18	64	0	0
Info. on company's EEC scheme	14	9	2	8	3	11	4	16	1	4	2	8	2	7	0	0
Fridgesavers information	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Information on Energy Labelling	11	7	1	4	3	11	2	8	1	4	2	8	2	7	0	0
Information on Tariffs	4	3	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	1	4	2	7	0	0
Information on Condensing Boilers	12	8	0	0	2	7	3	12	0	0	3	12	4	14	0	0
Information on CFLs	42	26	7	27	3	11	10	40	2	8	3	12	17	61	0	0
Info. on Priority Service Register	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other items	18	11	2	8	3	11	2	8	1	4	5	20	5	18	0	0

NUMBER RECEIVING INFORMATION BY POST																
Questionnaire/Home Energy Check	82	52	18	69	19	70	17	68	0	0	3	12	25	89	0	0
Report on measures to install	66	42	11	42	19	70	7	28	12	50	6	24	11	39	0	0
Booklet on energy saving	126	79	19	73	26	96	19	76	17	71	16	64	25	89	4	100
List of other sources of advice	27	17	6	23	3	11	5	20	1	4	7	28	5	18	0	0
Information on Grants	45	28	3	12	9	33	10	40	11	46	3	12	9	32	0	0
Info. on company's EEC scheme	36	23	6	23	6	22	11	44	1	4	0	0	12	43	0	0
Fridgesavers information	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Information on Energy Labelling	23	14	2	8	14	52	1	4	1	4	3	12	2	7	0	0
Information on Tariffs	16	10	2	8	1	4	5	20	1	4	3	12	4	14	0	0
Information on Condensing Boilers	22	14	3	12	2	7	8	32	0	0	2	8	7	25	0	0
Information on CFLs	60	38	6	23	2	7	15	60	8	33	4	16	25	89	0	0
Info. on Priority Service Register	4	3	0	0	2	7	0	0	0	0	2	8	0	0	0	0
Information on controlling storage heaters	10	6	0	0	1	4	5	20	0	0	2	8	2	7	0	0
Other items	76	48	13	50	8	30	17	68	6	25	16	64	16	57	0	0
No Information sent (excl. HEC)	24	15	7	27	1	4	6	24	4	17	4	16	2	7	0	0
AVERAGE NO. OF PUBLICATIONS SENT (excl HEC & Report)	3.6	n/a	2.4	n/a	2.9	n/a	5.6	n/a	4.4	n/a	2.6	n/a	3.7	n/a	1.0	n/a
% PROMISED INFO SENT		127		137		123		149		114		116		122		100
DAYS AFTER CALL ITEMS RECEIVED	1 to 15	n/a	1 to 9	n/a	1 to 13	n/a	1 to 15	n/a	1 to 5	n/a	1 to 15	n/a	2 to 8	n/a	5 to 10	n/a

Energy efficiency measures recommended to callers

In this section we explore which energy efficiency measures callers were advised to install, both by company and by scenario. Full results are shown in Tables 15A and 15B for the companies, and by scenario in Tables 10A and 10B, above. .

In 2003 around two thirds of our mystery shoppers (66%) were given some verbal advice on energy efficiency measures to install in their homes. This is an improvement on the 51% who were given such advice in 2002. Significantly more callers are now being advised to install some of the commoner measures:

MAIN MEASURES ADVISED	2002	2003
Loft insulation	20%	33%
Cavity wall insulation	19%	27%
CFLs	17%	26%
Draughtproofing	13%	17%
TRVs	8%	11%
Radiator foil	7%	11%
Double glazing	6%	9%

All companies except npower advised at least half our mystery shoppers in 2003 to install some energy efficiency measures. Several companies made significant improvements in the numbers of callers to whom they gave such advice – e.g. Scottish Power, Scottish & Southern and EDF Energy– while two companies dropped back – npower and British Gas.

% CALLERS ADVISED TO INSTALL ENERGY EFFICIENCY MEASURES BY ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES	2002	2003
ALL CALLERS TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES	51%	66%
British Gas	74%	65%
London SWEB/EDF Energy	59%	74%
npower	62%	48%
Powergen/TXU	52%	58%
Scottish & Southern	66%	80%
Scottish Power	18%	68%
Atlantic	0%	75%

Since we know from other research (EEACs 1993-1998 and HECA Monitoring 1998 to 2003) that over 90% of all UK homes still lack between four and nine appropriate energy efficiency measures, it is disappointing to find that not all households are being recommended some appropriate measures to install.

The number of recommendations to install *any measures* varied widely depending on the scenario presented by the mystery shoppers – as it did in 2002. There were improvements in the numbers of callers on each scenario who were advised to install some energy efficiency measures, but on three scenarios half or fewer of our callers were given any advice on measures to install: controlling hot water (50%), storage heater controls (45%) and energy saving appliances (15%). (See text table below, and Tables 9A and 9B.)

% CALLERS ADVISED TO INSTALL ENERGY EFFICIENCY MEASURES BY ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES	2002	2003
ALL CALLERS TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES	51%	66%
Scenario A: High bills	63%	77%
Scenario B: Cold home/elderly relative	74%	79%
Scenario C: Help to save energy	54%	69%
Scenario D: Energy saving appliances	11%	15%
Scenario E: What grants available	41%	79%
Scenario F: Insulating solid walls	n/a	67%
Scenario G: Controlling hot water	n/a	50%
Scenario H: Visit to explain storage heater controls	n/a	45%

There were some differences in the energy saving measures recommended by different companies' Energy Efficiency Helplines. Between 32% and 40% of callers to all companies, except Powergen and Atlantic, were advised to install or increase their loft insulation. But only 17% of callers to Powergen, and none of the callers to Atlantic were advised about loft insulation.

The same was true of cavity wall insulation, which was recommended to between 22% and 32% of callers to most companies, but only to 13% of Powergen customers and none of Atlantic's.

Most companies advised at least 15% to 36% of callers to install draughtproofing, but this was seldom advised by Powergen (8%) and EDF Energy (4%).

CFLs were usually recommended to between 25% and 36% of callers to most companies, but npower's energy advisers mentioned them to only 4% of callers.

British Gas was the company keenest to advise customers to install radiator foil (38%) and hot tank insulation (23%) which were seldom advised by other helplines.

(See Tables 9A, 9B, 10A, 10B, 13A, 13B, 15A and 15B)

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, JAN/FEB 2002

TABLE 15A

FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	Total		British Gas		London/ SWEB Grp		npower		Yorkshire		Northern		Powergen		Scottish & Southern		Scottish Power		Manweb		SEEBOARD		TXU Energi (East/Norweb)	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Major Suppliers	235	100	27	100	23	100	20	100	9	100	20	100	23	100	29	100	20	100	18	100	23	100	23	100
MEASURES RECOMMENDED																								
Loft Insulation	48	20	9	33	3	13	1	5	1	11	6	30	3	13	10	34	3	15	1	6	7	30	4	17
Cavity wall insulation	44	19	6	22	1	4	1	5	1	11	6	30	4	17	9	31	3	15	0	0	8	35	5	22
Draughtproofing	31	13	5	19	2	9	3	15	0	0	3	15	1	4	9	31	1	5	0	0	1	4	6	26
TRVs	18	8	3	11	2	9	1	5	1	11	0	0	4	17	4	14	1	5	0	0	2	9	0	0
CFLs	40	17	6	22	8	35	1	5	0	0	4	20	5	22	6	21	1	5	0	0	7	30	2	9
Double glazing	13	6	3	11	0	0	2	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	7	0	0	1	6	0	0	5	22
Radiators shelves	12	5	6	22	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	17	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0
Radiator foil/reflectors	16	7	9	33	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	17	1	5	0	0	1	4	0	0
New shower	1	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New boiler	2	1	2	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New condensing boiler	13	6	1	4	3	13	1	5	0	0	1	5	2	9	1	3	1	5	0	0	3	13	0	0
Insulation (unspecified)	6	3	1	4	2	9	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	9	0	0
Floor insulation	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4
Hot tank insulation	11	5	1	4	3	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	1	3	2	10	0	0	1	4	2	9
Hot water timer	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hot water thermostat	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pipe insulation	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	2	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Room thermostat	2	1	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0
Thicker curtains	4	2	2	7	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Storage Heaters/oil filled radiators	5	2	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	6	1	4	1	4
Central heating	3	1	1	4	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0
Central heating timer	4	2	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	1	5	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0
Dehumidifier	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4
"A" rated appliances	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, SEPT 2003

TABLE 15B

MAJOR FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	ALL		British Gas		EDF Energy		npower		Powergen/ TXU		Scottish & Southern		Scottish Power		Atlantic	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Energy Efficiency Helplines	159	100	26	100	27	100	25	100	24	100	25	100	28	100	4	100
MEASURES RECOMMENDED																
Loft Insulation	52	33	10	38	10	37	9	36	4	17	10	40	9	32	0	0
Cavity wall insulation	43	27	8	31	6	22	8	32	3	13	8	32	10	36	0	0
Solid wall insulation	7	4	2	8	1	4	1	4	1	4	1	4	1	4	0	0
Draughtproofing	27	17	4	15	1	4	4	16	2	8	5	20	10	36	1	25
TRVs	18	11	4	15	4	15	3	12	4	17	2	8	1	4	0	0
CFLs	41	26	7	27	8	30	1	4	6	25	8	32	10	36	1	25
Double glazing	15	9	2	8	3	11	5	20	2	8	1	4	0	0	2	50
Radiators shelves	7	4	5	19	1	4	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0
Radiator foil/reflectors	17	11	10	38	5	19	0	0	1	4	1	4	0	0	0	0
New shower	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New boiler	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New condensing boiler	10	6	1	4	2	7	1	4	2	8	1	4	2	7	1	25
Insulation (unspecified)	4	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	11	1	25
Floor insulation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hot tank insulation	9	6	6	23	1	4	0	0	1	4	1	4	0	0	0	0
Hot water timer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hot water thermostat	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pipe insulation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Room thermostat	4	3	1	4	0	0	0	0	3	13	0	0	0	0	0	0
Thicker curtains	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Storage Heaters/oil filled radiators	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Central heating	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Central heating timer	5	3	2	8	2	7	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dehumidifier	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
"A" rated appliances	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0

How Energy Efficiency Helplines responded to specific questions and requests

The second half of our mystery shopping calls to energy suppliers involved each of our assessors asking some extra questions designed to test the knowledge and services provided by these helplines. The questions involved probing for more information on grants which had been mentioned and on measures which had been recommended, and asking for more information on condensing boilers, low energy bulbs, control of heating, cavity wall or solid wall insulation, unused fireplaces, home visits, booklets on energy efficiency (a Condition 25 requirement), lists of other sources of advice (another Condition 25 requirement), and whether the call handlers had received any training to do their job. Results are shown in full in Tables 16A, 16B, 17A and 17B.

Grant information

45 mystery shoppers who had been told about any grants or EEC schemes asked the energy adviser what the scheme was called or what it covered, how to apply for it, how long installation might take, what it would cost and what it might save. These are all pieces of information which we believe a trained energy adviser should know or be able to access instantly. We found that energy advisers knew the name of a grant or EEC scheme in just over half the cases, and otherwise could usually say what it covered.

Providing information on how to apply is pretty crucial to encouraging take-up of any scheme, but we again found (as in 2002) that only British Gas was able to tell *all* the customers who asked how they should apply, and Powergen was able to tell most customers. Across all the other suppliers, energy advisers could only tell about half or fewer of those who asked how to apply. npower was very poor in this respect, being able to advise only a quarter of those who asked .

Less than a quarter of our callers were able to get any information on how long it might be before grant-aided measures could be installed, and two companies could give no idea to any callers – British Gas and Atlantic.

Just under half of those who enquired were told something about the cost to them (schemes ranged from 100% grants to 30% discount schemes). EDF Energy and Scottish Power seemed better at providing this information.

Callers also asked about likely savings from installing any grant-aided measures which had been suggested, but in only about a third of all cases could energy advisers give a useful indication of the possible savings. No company was particularly good at this.

Overall we feel that there has been no improvement in energy advisers' knowledge of grant and EEC schemes since 2002. We believe that failing to provide much of the information requested may discourage customers from taking up the recommended measures.

Information on measures recommended

Where any measures (not on a grant) had been recommended by the energy adviser on the telephone, our mystery shoppers asked for more information about one of those measures – what it might cost, what the effects or savings might be, and whether any grants were available.

This year 27% of our mystery shoppers asked about a measure they had been advised to install; 15% were told of the likely cost; 14% of the likely effects or savings; and 14% were told that a grant might be available after all. This pattern is slightly worse than it was in 2002.

Companies whose energy advisers seemed less knowledgeable about costs and savings seemed to be British Gas and Scottish Power.

Condensing boiler queries

43 of our mystery shoppers asked “what exactly are condensing boilers, and do they save money?”, and 34 (79% of those who asked) were given some more useful information on how they worked more efficiently or what they might save. Companies which were particularly good at providing such information were npower, Scottish Power and Atlantic.

But some of the explanations given by energy advisers (although reassuring on the whole to callers) still seem to be based on rather fanciful interpretations of the laws of physics:

“The condensing boiler returns the gas to be used again.”

Central heating queries

103 of our mystery shoppers chose to ask two questions about their central heating: “*Is it better to leave it on LOW all the time in winter, or to have it switching ON and OFF?*” “*And how often should I get my boiler serviced?*”

Conventional wisdom is that it is better to have the heating programmed to the occupancy pattern of the home – i.e. switching on only when it is needed. This advice was given in 71 cases (i.e. to 70% of those who asked). British Gas gave the best advice in 88% of cases.

Since it is now a mandatory safety requirement for rented premises to have their gas boilers serviced annually, we felt that this was the correct recommendation. But annual servicing was recommended in only 78% of the cases where this question was asked. This is poor and dangerous advice. Some advisers simply advised servicing the boiler “regularly” which is also not helpful. Energy advisers at Scottish & Southern and British Gas gave good advice here more often than did other companies.

Insulating cavity walls and solid walls

42 callers who had been advised to install cavity wall insulation asked what materials were used for this, and whether there were any problems with them. Only 26 of them (62%) received any useful verbal advice from energy advisers. This advice was sometimes rather “flaky” but generally reassuring. Advisers mentioned that dry materials were now used instead of foam and that all problems had been eliminated. A few callers were also referred to a cavity wall information centre.

38 callers who had solid walls in their homes asked whether there was any way of insulating these. 27 (71%) received useful information on methods (usually “dry-lining”) but only 9 (24%) were told about possible costs.

We believe there is room for advisers to improve their knowledge of some of the options for insulating cavity and solid walls. It would have been helpful if more advisers mentioned materials and installers approved for cavity wall insulation by the British Board of Agrément, or if advisers had more ideas about the costs and savings from dry-lining.

Queries on low energy bulbs

68 of our callers asked “*What are low energy bulbs? How much do they cost, and how much do they save?*” 44 of these callers (65%) received an adequate explanation of what they are – e.g. much more efficient, long-lasting, compact fluorescent lamps - and 78% were told roughly what they cost and saved, or at least reassured that they did save energy, payback their cost many times over, and last a long time. Knowledge of CFLs seemed good amongst most energy advisers, except at EDF Energy where quite a few callers did not get adequate explanations.

Query about unused fireplace and chimney

31 of our mystery shoppers had unused fireplaces and chimneys and asked “*I have a fireplace and a chimney I don’t use any more. Should I block it up?*”

30 of these callers (97%) were given some useful advice. The best came from British Gas advisers, who usually advised consulting a CORGI registered engineer to check whether the chimney might not be needed to provide ventilation for a gas appliance within the home. Other advisers usually advised blocking the chimney as this reduced heat losses and draughts, but they only occasionally mentioned consulting a builder or heating engineer about the possible ventilation needs of gas appliances. Without this caveat such advice is potentially dangerous.

Queries about Home Visits

Fuel companies have never been required to provide home visits, although some have in the past and still appear to provide these, which is good. Last year we found a high degree of disagreement and uncertainty among energy advisers as to whether such visits were available. Our callers again asked “*Do you ever visit old people at home to give this sort of advice, because I have an elderly aunt who might appreciate this help?*”.

119 of our callers asked their energy adviser this question, and two thirds were told that the company did offer home visits; the remaining third were told that it did not, or the adviser did not know, or that home visits were only available in certain areas.

The company where most advisers seemed confident that home visits were available was Powergen (15 out of 16 callers were told they were). British Gas advisers seemed the most uncertain: out of 21 callers 8 were told home visits could be provided, and 8 were told that they could not.

Where advisers say that home visits can be provided, they do usually say that these are free.

(See Tables 16A and 16B)

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, JAN/FEB 2002

TABLE 16A

FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	Total		British Gas		London/ SWEB Grp		npower		Yorkshire		Northern		Powergen		Scottish & Southern		Scottish Power		Manweb		SEEBOARD		TXU Energi (East/Norweb)	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Major Suppliers	235	100	27	100	23	100	20	100	9	100	20	100	23	100	29	100	20	100	18	100	23	100	23	100
GRANT INFORMATION																								
No. asking for more details of Grants	115	49	16	59	12	52	11	55	3	33	11	55	15	65	11	38	5	25	3	17	16	70	12	52
CH gave Name of scheme	55	23	9	33	6	26	8	40	2	22	4	20	7	30	4	14	2	10	2	11	7	30	4	17
CH said what scheme covered	45	19	6	22	6	26	3	15	1	11	8	40	6	26	3	10	0	0	1	6	5	22	6	26
CH told caller how to apply	86	37	16	59	6	26	9	45	2	22	8	40	8	35	9	31	3	15	2	11	12	52	11	48
CH knew how long to install	30	13	3	11	5	22	0	0	0	0	5	25	2	9	5	17	1	5	0	0	7	30	2	9
CH knew cost to customer	67	29	10	37	4	17	6	30	3	33	9	45	7	30	9	31	2	10	2	11	11	48	4	17
CH knew likely savings	56	24	7	26	7	30	4	20	2	22	10	50	2	9	7	24	0	0	2	11	10	43	5	22
MEASURES RECOMMENDED INFORMATION																								
No. asking for info on Measures	106	45	18	67	12	52	11	55	2	22	6	30	13	57	19	66	4	20	2	11	10	43	9	39
CH knew costs	60	26	8	30	10	43	8	40	2	22	4	20	6	26	9	31	1	5	0	0	8	35	4	17
CH knew effects/savings	85	36	15	56	7	30	9	45	1	11	5	25	11	48	17	59	4	20	2	11	7	30	7	30
CH said grant may be available	27	11	4	15	2	9	5	25	1	11	2	10	2	9	3	10	2	10	1	6	1	4	4	17
CONDENSING BOILER QUERY																								
No. asking about Cond. Boilers	154	66	21	78	13	57	15	75	8	89	14	70	15	65	18	62	10	50	9	50	17	74	14	61
CH provided useful information	126	54	20	74	12	52	10	50	7	78	12	60	14	61	15	52	3	15	4	22	17	74	12	52
LOW ENERGY BULBS QUERY																								
No. asking about Low Energy Bulbs	187	80	22	81	20	87	18	90	9	100	17	85	18	78	26	90	11	55	11	61	18	78	17	74
CH explained what they are	157	67	22	81	15	65	17	85	7	78	15	75	15	65	22	76	6	30	8	44	16	70	14	61
CH quoted costs/savings	165	70	21	78	19	83	16	80	8	89	16	80	16	70	24	83	6	30	8	44	16	70	15	65
HOME VISITS																								
No. asking about Home Visits	174	74	24	89	21	91	18	90	6	67	15	75	18	78	23	79	8	40	10	56	17	74	14	61
CH said Home Visits offered	75	32	5	19	19	83	5	25	0	0	6	30	8	35	9	31	6	30	4	22	9	39	4	17
Home Visits not offered	70	30	16	59	0	0	9	45	3	33	4	20	8	35	10	34	1	5	6	33	5	22	8	35
Don't know	9	4	0	0	2	9	1	5	1	11	0	0	2	9	0	0	0	0	1	6	1	4	1	4
Others (e.g. some areas/PSR)	22	9	5	19	0	0	3	15	2	22	5	25	1	4	2	7	1	5	0	0	2	9	1	4
Home visits Free	71	30	4	15	19	83	5	25	1	11	6	30	8	35	7	24	5	25	5	28	8	35	3	13

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, SEPT 2003

TABLE 16B

MAJOR FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	ALL		British Gas		EDF Energy		npower		Powergen/ TXU		Scottish & Southern		Scottish Power		Atlantic	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Energy Efficiency Helplines	159	100	26	100	27	100	25	100	24	100	25	100	28	100	4	100
GRANT INFORMATION																
No. asking for more details of Grants	45	28	4	15	8	30	4	16	6	25	9	36	12	43	2	50
CH gave Name of scheme	26	16	3	12	4	15	3	12	6	25	6	24	3	11	1	25
CH said what scheme covered	12	8	1	4	4	15	0	0	0	0	1	4	6	21	0	0
CH told caller how to apply	27	17	4	15	4	15	1	4	5	21	5	20	7	25	1	25
CH knew how long to install	10	6	0	0	1	4	1	4	1	4	3	12	4	14	0	0
CH knew cost to customer	21	13	2	8	8	30	1	4	1	4	2	8	7	25	0	0
CH knew likely savings	15	9	1	4	2	7	1	4	2	8	3	12	5	18	1	25
MEASURES RECOMMENDED INFORMATION																
No. asking for info on Measures	43	27	7	27	9	33	5	20	7	29	10	40	5	18	0	0
CH knew costs	24	15	4	15	7	26	3	12	3	13	5	20	2	7	0	0
CH knew effects/savings	23	14	1	4	5	19	3	12	6	25	7	28	1	4	0	0
CH said grant may be available	22	14	4	15	5	19	2	8	3	13	5	20	3	11	0	0
CONDENSING BOILER QUERY																
No. asking about Condensing Boilers	43	27	5	19	8	30	7	28	6	25	5	20	11	39	1	25
CH provided useful information	34	21	4	15	6	22	7	28	4	17	1	4	11	39	1	25
CENTRAL HEATING SYSTEM QUERY																
No. asking about central heating system	103	65	17	65	15	56	17	68	13	54	18	72	20	71	3	75
CH advised switching heating on and off/using timer	71	45	15	58	10	37	11	44	10	42	10	40	13	46	2	50
CH advised annual servicing of boiler	80	50	15	58	11	41	13	52	8	33	17	68	14	50	2	50
CAVITY WALL INSULATION QUERY																
No. asking about cavity wall insulation	42	26	8	31	7	26	7	28	5	21	5	20	10	36	0	0
CH provided useful information	26	16	5	19	4	15	3	12	2	8	4	16	8	29	0	0
SOLID WALL INSULATION QUERY																
No. asking about solid wall insulation	38	24	4	15	4	15	6	24	6	25	10	40	6	21	2	50
CH provided useful information	27	17	3	12	3	11	6	24	5	21	7	28	1	4	2	50
CH knew costs	9	6	0	0	2	7	1	4	2	8	3	12	0	0	1	25
LOW ENERGY BULBS QUERY																
No. asking about Low Energy Bulbs	68	43	11	42	14	52	17	68	8	33	7	28	11	39	0	0
CH explained what they are	44	28	6	23	7	26	12	48	7	29	5	20	7	25	0	0
CH quoted costs/savings	53	33	10	38	9	33	14	56	8	33	4	16	8	29	0	0
UNUSED FIREPLACE/CHIMNEY QUERY																
No. asking about unused fireplace/chimney	31	19	7	27	2	7	4	16	4	17	7	28	5	18	2	50
CH provided useful information	30	19	7	27	2	7	3	12	4	17	7	28	5	18	2	50
HOME VISITS																
No. asking about Home Visits	119	75	21	81	19	70	21	84	16	67	20	80	19	68	3	75
CH said Home Visits offered	80	50	8	31	14	52	14	56	15	63	13	52	16	57	0	0
Home Visits not offered	19	12	8	31	1	4	2	8	1	4	5	20	1	4	1	25
Don't know	6	4	0	0	1	4	2	8	0	0	1	4	1	4	1	25
Others (e.g. some areas/PSR)	14	9	5	19	3	11	3	12	0	0	1	4	1	4	1	25
Home visits Free	66	42	7	27	12	44	13	52	14	58	7	28	13	46	0	0

Requests for booklets on energy efficiency

A “Code of Practice on Energy Efficiency” is supposed to be published by all fuel suppliers, and 73% of our 159 mystery shoppers were offered a general booklet on energy efficiency quite early on in their calls. Another 26 callers later asked for one, and 22 were told that one was available and would be sent. Only three callers (2% of all callers) were told no such booklet was available – one each by British Gas, npower and Scottish & Southern – and one was told it was out of print by Powergen. This situation is slightly better than in 2002 when 4% of callers were told that their supplier had no such booklet.

But even though 91% of all our callers were finally promised such a booklet in 2003 (compared to 81% in 2002) only 79% actually received one. A few (6%) did receive some other publications instead, but 15% of callers received no publications at all. The companies which failed to provide such booklets to several callers were Scottish & Southern (64% received one), Powergen (71%), British Gas (73%) and npower (76%). On the whole this situation is much improved since 2002, when fewer than half the callers to Scottish Power/Manweb and TXU received such a booklet.

Requests for lists of other sources of advice

The licence conditions also require these energy companies to publish a list of alternative sources of advice. This can be included in the Code of Practice or other publications. Our mystery shoppers asked “I’m interested in knowing some more about this energy saving. Are there any other local sources of advice you can let me have a list of?” 33% of our callers were offered such a list earlier in their call, and another 37% specifically asked for one later. Almost all (33%) were told that it was included in the booklet or would be sent separately. Only 4% of callers were told in 2003 that no such list was available – an improvement on 2002 when 17% were told this.

The training of Energy Advisers

Call Handlers should be properly trained to provide energy advice if they are to act as Energy Advisers on a fuel company’s Energy Efficiency Helpline. We knew this would be a difficult question for mystery shoppers to ask without “giving the game away”, so we suggested they only ask if they felt they had established good rapport with the call handler: *“You seem to know a lot about energy efficiency. Do you go on special training to learn all that?”*

This question was asked by 56 of our mystery shoppers (35%) and 53 call handlers (95% of those asked) claimed to be specially trained for the job – usually with City & Guilds qualifications. All call handlers whom we asked at the following companies claimed to be trained for the job: npower, Scottish & Southern, Scottish Power and Atlantic. But at each of these companies our mystery shoppers encountered one adviser who did not claim to be trained: British Gas, EDF Energy and Powergen.

Details requested by call handlers

At the beginning of our mystery shopping calls we logged that only 41% of callers were asked for details like their name or customer number which might help the call handler call up their billing details. We believe it is good practice to record all energy efficiency enquiries together with the customer's name, address, and telephone number - as the latter is vital if the company is to commission any independent monitoring of its advice (which would be good practice) and plans to do this through telephone interviews.

At the end of the mystery shopping telephone call our callers also recorded whether or not these details were requested again or checked, as might be necessary if the energy adviser was posting any information or logging the query. We now found that 84% of our callers were asked for their name (78% in 2002), 82% for their address (79% in 2002), but only 31% for their telephone number (41% in 2002). It may be that some of these companies have number recognition software which automatically records the caller's number; if not then standards are slipping in the recording of callers' telephone numbers, and this may prejudice (and bias) any future monitoring research. Callers may also be calling from work rather than home, so we believe it is always worthwhile to check callers' numbers.

Companies which seem below average in recording some of these details are British Gas (only 73% of callers' names recorded), npower (only 16% of phone numbers recorded) and Powergen (only 63% of names and 13% of numbers recorded).

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, JAN/FEB 2002

TABLE 17A

FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	Total		British Gas		London/ SWEB Grp		npower		Yorkshire		Northern		Powergen		Scottish & Southern		Scottish Power		Manweb		SEEBOARD		TXU Energi (East/Norweb)	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Major Suppliers	235	100	27	100	23	100	20	100	9	100	20	100	23	100	29	100	20	100	18	100	23	100	23	100
BOOKLET ON ENERGY EFFICIENCY																								
No. asking for Booklet	105	45	18	67	4	17	13	65	0	0	14	70	12	52	13	45	4	20	6	33	8	35	13	57
Yes - we have one & will send it	92	39	15	56	4	17	13	65	0	0	13	65	11	48	13	45	1	5	4	22	7	30	11	48
No - we don't have one	9	4	2	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	15	2	11	0	0	2	9
Normally have, but out of print	2	1	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0
Don't know if one available	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

LIST OF OTHER SOURCES OF ADVICE																								
No. asking for a list	148	63	21	78	11	48	9	45	6	67	17	85	16	70	17	59	11	55	11	61	17	74	12	52
Yes - it's in the Booklet/we'll send one	107	46	14	52	10	43	9	45	4	44	11	55	13	57	12	41	6	30	5	28	15	65	8	35
No - we don't have one	39	17	7	26	1	4	0	0	1	11	5	25	2	9	4	14	5	25	6	33	2	9	6	26
No. of mentions of other sources	68	29	11	41	7	30	6	30	0	0	8	40	8	35	11	38	4	20	1	6	7	30	5	22

TRAINING OF ADVISERS																								
No. asking if adviser was trained	88	37	17	63	8	35	9	45	3	33	10	50	6	26	11	38	4	20	2	11	12	52	6	26
CHs claiming to be trained	78	33	17	63	7	30	8	40	3	33	10	50	6	26	11	38	0	0	1	6	11	48	4	17

DETAILS REQUESTED BY CH																								
Name	184	78	22	81	17	74	19	95	9	100	19	95	19	83	27	93	9	45	11	61	19	83	13	57
Address	186	79	20	74	18	78	19	95	9	100	19	95	19	83	27	93	9	45	11	61	19	83	16	70
Phone Number	96	41	14	52	3	13	9	45	4	44	10	50	6	26	26	90	3	15	4	22	14	61	3	13

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, SEPT 2003
TABLE 17B

MAJOR FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	ALL		British Gas		EDF Energy		npower		Powergen/ TXU		Scottish & Southern		Scottish Power		Atlantic	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Energy Efficiency Helplines	159	100	26	100	27	100	25	100	24	100	25	100	28	100	4	100
BOOKLET ON ENERGY EFFICIENCY																
No. already offered a Booklet	116	73	19	73	20	74	19	76	17	71	14	56	24	86	3	75
No. asking for Booklet	26	16	5	19	4	15	3	12	3	13	9	36	2	7	0	0
Yes - we have one & will send it	22	14	4	15	4	15	2	8	2	8	8	32	2	7	0	0
No - we don't have one	3	2	1	4	0	0	1	4	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0
Normally have, but out of print	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Don't know if one available	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

LIST OF OTHER SOURCES OF ADVICE																
No. already offered a list	52	33	8	31	4	15	11	44	8	33	8	32	13	46	0	0
No. asking for a list	59	37	11	42	14	52	6	24	6	25	9	36	11	39	2	50
Yes - it's in the Booklet/we'll send one	53	33	10	38	13	48	5	20	4	17	9	36	10	36	2	50
No - we don't have one	6	4	1	4	1	4	1	4	2	8	0	0	1	4	0	0
No. of mentions of other sources	38	24	6	23	7	26	3	12	16	67	3	12	1	4	2	50

TRAINING OF ADVISERS																
No. asking if adviser was trained	56	35	10	38	13	48	10	40	8	33	9	36	5	18	1	25
CHs claiming to be trained	53	33	9	35	12	44	10	40	7	29	9	36	5	18	1	25

DETAILS REQUESTED BY CH																
Name	133	84	19	73	24	89	24	96	15	63	21	84	26	93	4	100
Address	131	82	18	69	24	89	24	96	15	63	20	80	26	93	4	100
Phone Number	50	31	10	38	11	41	4	16	3	13	11	44	7	25	4	100

Customers' impressions of the Energy Efficiency Helplines

At the end of each call, we asked our mystery shoppers to record their impressions of the call handler's knowledge of energy efficiency, whether the call was handled in a professional manner, how polite the call handler was, and how easy or difficult they found it to understand the verbal advice and explanations given by the call handler. In 2002 we found some big variations in the ratings these major fuel suppliers received on some of these criteria. The full results for 2002 are shown in Table 18A, and for 2003 in Table 18B.

Impressions of the call handlers' knowledge of energy efficiency

It was here that in 2002 we found the biggest differences in our mystery shoppers' ratings of these major fuel suppliers. We feel it is reasonable for customers to expect trained energy advisers manning the energy efficiency helplines of major fuel suppliers to be knowledgeable about energy efficiency. We therefore asked our callers to rate their call handler as to whether they "knew a great deal about energy efficiency", "knew quite a lot about energy efficiency", "knew only a little about energy efficiency", or "knew nothing about energy efficiency". We also allocated points for each answer from 100 (for "knew a great deal"), through 67 and 33 to 0 (for "knew nothing") and so calculated an "Average Knowledge Score" out of 100.

In 2002 we found that the companies really fell into three groups as far as the apparent knowledge of their energy advisers is concerned. In the top group, where we felt most energy advisers seemed to have a reasonable level of knowledge, were British Gas, Scottish & Southern and London/SWEB. Then came a middle group where most call handlers seemed to know "a great deal" or "quite a lot" about energy efficiency, but where there also appeared to be significant numbers of call handlers (i.e. more than 15%) who gave the impression of knowing "only a little" or "nothing at all" about energy efficiency: Northern, Seaboard, Powergen, npower, Yorkshire, TXU. Finally there was the third group of companies which generally gave the most limited advice to our callers, and where (consequently) our callers felt that most of the call handlers knew "little or nothing" about energy efficiency: Manweb and Scottish Power. These groups and their scores from 2002 are shown in the text table below, with the scores for 2003 alongside to show how much some energy advisers' knowledge seems to have improved:

ASSESORS' RATINGS OF ENERGY ADVISERS' KNOWLEDGE OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY (OUT OF 100)	2002	2003
ALL ENERGY ADVISERS	67	80
Atlantic	n/r	92
British Gas	83	76
Scottish & Southern	82	81
London/SWEB - now EDF Energy	77	84
Seaboard	75	
npower	67	
Yorkshire	63	76
Northern	73	
Powergen	68	87
TXU	56	
Scottish Power	31	76
Manweb	39	

In 2002 we suggested that companies in the last two groups should be looking to raise the levels of knowledge of some or all of the call handlers who provide energy advice via their energy efficiency helplines. This seems to have been achieved by all the companies in these groups, with Powergen/TXU and Scottish Power/Manweb making the most significant improvements, but with the npower and EDF Energy groups also making gains.

But at the top of the table there seems to be some complacency; the British Gas rating has slipped slightly as has Scottish & Southern.

Impressions of call handlers' Professionalism in handling calls

The great majority of our callers (91%) rated the energy advisers as “professional” in the way they handled calls – this is an improvement over the 83% achieved in 2002. Scottish & Southern advisers again get a 100% rating as they did in 2002, and so does Atlantic. But British Gas has slipped slightly to 85% (from 100% last year) and 15% of callers rated their call handlers as “unprofessional”. Powergen’s advisers were only rated as “professional” by 79% of callers, much the same as last year.

Impressions of the call handlers' Politeness in handling calls

Here again we found that most of our mystery shoppers rated the call handlers who dealt with their queries as either “excellent/very courteous” (67%) or “good/polite” (25%). Only a very few call handlers were described as “impersonal” (4%), “poor/brusque” (1%) or “rude/aggressive” (1%). The overall rating of 90 points was one higher than last year’s 89.

We again calculated an average “Politeness Score” out of 100 for each company. Most companies scored between 90 and 100, but npower (88) and Scottish Power (86) fielded at least two calls where the adviser was rated as impersonal, brusque or rude/aggressive. Despite this, Scottish Power’s score was a significant improvement on last year’s 71.

How easy or difficult it was to understand the energy adviser's advice

Overall most of the verbal advice provided by energy advisers was rated as “very easy to understand” (60%) or “quite easy to understand” (30%) – almost identical to 2002. Just a few callers found “some things easy and some things hard to understand” (4%), “quite hard to understand” (1%) or even “very hard to understand” (1%). These results are encouraging and suggest that the language used by call handlers is readily understood by many callers. There were no major differences by company and all were rated between 84 and 94 on their “Average Understandability Score”.

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, JAN/FEB 2002

TABLE 18A

FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	Total		British Gas		London/ SWEB Grp		npower		Yorkshire		Northern		Powergen		Scottish & Southern		Scottish Power		Manweb		SEEBOARD		TXU Energi (East/Norweb)	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Major Suppliers	235	100	27	100	23	100	20	100	9	100	20	100	23	100	29	100	20	100	18	100	23	100	23	100
IMPRESSIONS OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY KNOWLEDGE OF CALL HANDLER																								
Knew a great deal about en. eff.	79	34	15	56	9	39	8	40	2	22	8	40	6	26	14	48	1	5	3	17	9	39	4	17
Knew quite a lot about en. eff.	90	38	10	37	13	57	4	20	5	56	8	40	12	52	14	48	4	20	4	22	8	35	8	35
Knew only a little about en. eff.	35	15	2	7	0	0	6	30	1	11	4	20	3	13	1	3	6	30	4	22	4	17	4	17
Knew nothing about en. eff.	21	9	0	0	1	4	1	5	1	11	0	0	1	4	0	0	7	35	7	39	0	0	3	13
Average "Knowledge" Score (Max: 100 – based on all answers)		67		83		77		67		63		73		68		82		31		39		75		56

PROFESSIONALISM																								
CH handled call in professional manner	195	83	27	100	22	96	15	75	7	78	18	90	18	78	29	100	13	65	10	56	18	78	18	78
CH handled call in unprofessional manner	25	11	0	0	1	4	4	20	2	22	0	0	2	9	0	0	5	25	6	33	3	13	2	9

POLITENESS																								
CH excellent/very courteous	144	61	23	85	14	61	11	55	3	33	11	55	12	52	26	90	3	15	7	39	20	87	14	61
CH good/polite	66	28	4	15	9	39	4	20	6	67	7	35	9	39	3	10	9	45	9	50	2	9	4	17
CH impersonal	13	6	0	0	0	0	4	20	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	6	30	1	6	0	0	1	4
CH poor/brusque	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	1	6	0	0	0	0
CH rude/aggressive	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Average "Politeness" Score (Max: 100 – base: all answers)		89		96		90		84		83		88		86		97		71		81		98		92

EASE OF UNDERSTANDING ADVICE																								
Very easy to understand	139	59	19	70	13	57	11	55	2	22	15	75	13	57	20	69	10	50	10	56	12	52	14	61
Quite easy to understand	70	30	8	30	8	35	8	40	6	67	3	15	8	35	9	31	4	20	3	17	8	35	5	22
Some things easy/some things hard to understand	11	5	0	0	2	9	0	0	1	11	1	5	1	4	0	0	2	10	2	11	2	9	0	0
Quite hard to understand	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4
Very hard to understand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Average "Understandability" Score (Max:100, base all answers)		89		93		87		86		78		93		89		92		88		88		86		90

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, SEPT 2003

TABLE 18B

MAJOR FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	ALL		British Gas		EDF Energy		npower		Powergen/ TXU		Scottish & Southern		Scottish Power		Atlantic	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Energy Efficiency Helplines	159	100	26	100	27	100	25	100	24	100	25	100	28	100	4	100
IMPRESSIONS OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY KNOWLEDGE OF CALL HANDLER																
Knew a great deal about en. eff.	79	50	14	54	15	56	10	40	14	58	13	52	10	36	3	75
Knew quite a lot about en. eff.	61	38	8	31	11	41	12	48	6	25	10	40	13	46	1	25
Knew only a little about en. eff.	11	7	1	4	1	4	3	12	1	4	2	8	3	11	0	0
Knew nothing about en. eff.	3	2	3	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Average "Knowledge" Score (Max: 100 - based on all answers)		80		76		84		76		87		81		76		92

PROFESSIONALISM																
CH handled call in professional manner	144	91	22	85	26	96	24	96	19	79	25	100	24	86	4	100
CH handled call in unprofessional manner	8	5	4	15	0	0	1	4	1	4	0	0	2	7	0	0

POLITENESS																
CH excellent/very courteous	106	67	18	69	18	67	16	64	15	63	19	76	16	57	4	100
CH good/polite	39	25	6	23	7	26	7	28	5	21	5	20	9	32	0	0
CH impersonal	6	4	2	8	2	7	1	4	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0
CH poor/brusque	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	4	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
CH rude/aggressive	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0
Average "Politeness" Score (Max: 100 - based on all answers)		90		90		90		88		90		95		86		100

EASE OF UNDERSTANDING ADVICE																
Very easy to understand	96	60	15	58	16	59	15	60	13	54	18	72	16	57	3	75
Quite easy to understand	47	30	9	35	11	41	8	32	7	29	5	20	6	21	1	25
Some things easy/some things hard to u'stand	7	4	2	8	0	0	1	4	0	0	2	8	2	7	0	0
Quite hard to understand	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	1	4	0	0
Very hard to understand	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0
Average "Understandability" Score (Max: 100 - based on all answers)		88		88		90		90		88		91		84		94

Printed information and advice promised and sent following the telephone calls to Energy Efficiency Helplines

The rest of this section of the report deals with the information our mystery shoppers received following their initial telephone call, and their responses to and views of the whole “energy advice experience”.

Tables 14A and 14B (on pages 42 & 43) show a list of all the types of printed information offered or promised by Energy Efficiency Helplines, and the types of printed information later received.

As we have already seen above in the section which deals with how each fuel company responded to our callers queries, not all the printed information which was offered or promised was sent, and sometimes additional information which had not been requested was sent instead. For example, here are the overall numbers of callers being promised specific information, in 2002 and 2003, compared with the number actually sent that information later by post:

TABLE 19 PRINTED INFORMATION PROMISED AND SENT	JAN/FEB 2002		SEPT 2003	
	% of callers promised each item	% of callers receiving each item	% of callers promised each item	% of callers receiving each item
Base: All Mystery Shoppers calling Energy Efficiency Helplines	235 100%	235 100%	159 100%	159 100%
Booklet on energy saving	81%	62%	91%	79%
Questionnaire/Home Energy Check	20%	20%	47%	52%
Report on measures to install	3%	11%	33%	42%
List of other sources of advice	11%	5%	31%	17%
Information on Grants	18%	17%	29%	28%
Info. on company's EEC scheme	9%	10%	9%	23%
Fridgesavers information	3%	5%	1%	1%
Information on Energy Labelling	7%	9%	7%	14%
Information on Tariffs	3%	4%	3%	10%
Information on Condensing Boilers	15%	11%	8%	14%
Information on CFLs	22%	27%	26%	38%
Info. on Priority Service Register	2%	2%	0%	3%
Info. on controlling storage heaters	n/a	n/a	n/a	6%
Other items	8%	31%	11%	48%
No Information sent (excl. HEC)	n/a	29%	n/a	15%
% PROMISED INFO SENT	n/a	106%	n/a	127%

Looking at the table above we can see that more printed information is being promised to customers in 2003 than in 2002, and that more of the promised information is being sent. In some cases in 2003 significantly more callers are being sent some items than had expected them – *Home Energy Reports* and information on EEC, energy labelling, tariffs, condensing boilers and CFLs. The number of callers sent no information (except a questionnaire) has also dropped from 29% to 15%, although this is still not satisfactory.

In 2002 we noted that although overall rather more “bits of information” are finally sent than originally offered, the biggest discrepancy was a failure to send a general booklet on energy saving, although this was often specifically asked for by our callers where it had not already been offered. 81% of callers were promised one, but only 62% received one. This situation

has improved significantly in 2003, although all companies occasionally fail to send a general booklet to some callers, as Table 20A shows:

TABLE 20A GENERAL BOOKLET ON ENERGY EFFICIENCY - PROMISED AND SENT	JAN/FEB 2002			SEPT 2003		
	% of callers promised booklet	% of callers receiving booklet	% of all promised booklet who received it	% of callers promised booklet	% of callers receiving booklet	% of all promised booklet who received it
ALL SUPPLIERS	81%	62%	76%	91%	79%	88%
British Gas	85%	63%	74%	88%	73%	83%
London Energy	n/a	n/a	n/a	96%	96%	100%
London/SWEB	96%	87%	91%	n/a	n/a	n/a
Seaboard	83%	83%	100%	n/a	n/a	n/a
npower	90%	70%	78%	92%	76%	83%
Yorkshire	100%	78%	78%	n/a	n/a	n/a
Northern	90%	65%	72%	n/a	n/a	n/a
Powergen/TXU	n/a	n/a	n/a	83%	71%	85%
Powergen	87%	70%	80%	n/a	n/a	n/a
TXU Energi	74%	43%	59%	n/a	n/a	n/a
Scottish & Southern	97%	72%	75%	84%	64%	76%
Scottish Power	35%	25%	71%	96%	89%	93%
Manweb	56%	22%	40%	n/a	n/a	n/a
Atlantic	0%	0%	n/a	100%	100%	100%

We have also computed a “% of Promised Information Sent” score (see Tables 14A and 14B). In 2002 we found that about 106 items of information were sent out for every 100 originally promised. In terms of actual numbers of publications, the main tables also show the average number of publications per caller (excluding Home Energy Checks and Reports which are covered separately). By 2003 these companies were sending out on average 127 items of information for every 100 promised, and no company was sending out fewer items than it had promised (even if not all the individual items promised were sent).

Companies which now tend to send out significantly more types of information than they had originally promised are npower (149 items for every 100 promised), British Gas (137), EDF Energy(123) and Scottish Power (122).

This year (2003) our mystery shoppers each received 3.6 publications on average from Energy Efficiency Helplines (excluding questionnaires and reports), compared to 2.8 publications received per caller in 2002. Questionnaires were received by many more callers (47%) in 2003 compared to 2002 (20%) and of course many more callers were asked detailed questions over the telephone. Not surprisingly *Home Energy Reports* were received by 42% of callers this year compared to only 11% in 2002. We believe this is another significant improvement in the service provided.

Companies which seem to be better than others at delivering printed information on grants are Powergen (46%), npower (40%), EDF Energy(33%) and Scottish Power (32%). But British Gas and Scottish & Southern sent grant information to only 12% of callers. npower and Scottish Power were also good at sending more callers information on EEC schemes (44% and 43% respectively), on condensing boilers (32% and 25%) and on CFLs (60% and 89%).

Where publications were sent out, they usually came quite promptly – often arriving within one to four days of the original call, although a few callers had to wait up to 10 to 15 days for some information to arrive from EDF Energy, npower and Scottish & Southern. No materials received over 28 days after the original call have been recorded here.

(See Tables 14A and 14B)

Questionnaires and Home Energy Reports

In 2002 we concluded from other research done by New Perspectives (for the Energy Advice Providers Group, 2002) that the combination of verbal advice over the telephone, followed up by a written report on appropriate measures to install in the home, is one of the most persuasive forms of energy efficiency advice.

We therefore concluded it should be good practice for energy advice services, including fuel suppliers, to offer and promote Home Energy Reports based on DIY home energy audits such as the Home Energy Check questionnaire. But in 2002 the use of self-completion energy audit questionnaires and the issuing of Home Energy Reports (based on the completed questionnaires) varied widely by company.

Ofgem then included in its Good Practice Principles the suggestion that *Home Energy Reports* should be more widely used to provide appropriate advice. From the results of this 2003 mystery shopping survey we are pleased to report that all major energy suppliers now seem to be making much more use of detailed questions, questionnaires and *Home Energy Reports*, even if some reports seem to take longer than 28 days to arrive:

TABLE 20B USE OF DETAILED QUESTIONS/QU'AIRES & HOME ENERGY REPORTS	JAN/FEB 2002			SEPT 2003		
	% of callers asked detailed Questions	% of callers receiving Qu'aire	% of all callers receiving REPORT in 28 days	% of callers asked detailed Questions	% of callers receiving Qu'aire	% of all callers receiving REPORT in 28 days
ALL SUPPLIERS	10%	20%	11%	41%	52%	42%
British Gas	7%	7%	4%	35%	69%	42%
EDF Energy	n/a	n/a	n/a	41%	70%	70%
London/SWEB	0%	57%	39%	n/a	n/a	n/a
Seaboard	9%	0%	0%	n/a	n/a	n/a
npower	0%	50%	15%	36%	68%	28%
Yorkshire	0%	56%	22%	n/a	n/a	n/a
Northern	10%	40%	25%	n/a	n/a	n/a
Powergen/TXU	n/a	n/a	n/a	67%	0%	50%
Powergen	17%	0%	0%	n/a	n/a	n/a
TXU Energi	4%	17%	4%	n/a	n/a	n/a
Scottish & Southern	31%	7%	10%	40%	12%	24%
Scottish Power	15%	10%	5%	29%	89%	39%
Manweb	0%	11%	6%	n/a	n/a	n/a
Atlantic	0%	0%	0%	50%	0%	0%

All the major companies are now making more use of expert systems to ask questions and provide *Home Energy Reports* than they did in 2002, but two companies – npower and Scottish & Southern - are still well below the norm in their use of this facility.

Completing Home Energy Audit Questionnaires

As part of this project we asked our mystery shoppers to agree to receive such questionnaires where they were offered, and to complete and return them when they were sent. In 2003 82 of our mystery shoppers received such questionnaires, and 74 completed and returned them.

In our own follow-up questionnaire on their experience of getting energy advice, we then asked our mystery shoppers how easy or difficult they found these Home Energy Check questionnaires to complete. Almost all the 74 mystery shoppers who completed a questionnaire said they found it “easy” or “very easy”. 71 of them subsequently received a Home Energy Report within the next four weeks, and almost all found this “easy” to understand.

We conclude from this research that it is a real improvement in the service provided by Energy Efficiency Helplines to give *Home Energy Reports* to more customers. It also seems to have helped to improve customers’ ratings of the overall usefulness of advice, and their willingness to follow it (see below).

(See Tables 22A and 22B)

Likely take-up of Measures advised

Even though our mystery shoppers were not all customers who really faced the problems they described, we again felt that it would be worthwhile asking them whether they felt they would take up any of the measures recommended by the Energy Efficiency Helplines of their fuel suppliers.

Of our 159 mystery shoppers who had called the major suppliers’ helplines, 49% felt in 2003 they were likely to install some of the measures recommended (41% said this in 2002) and between them these 78 callers felt they would install some 117 measures – 1.5 measures each on average (compared to 1.3 each on average in 2002).

The fuel company which appeared to give the most persuasive advice was EDF Energy (74% of callers installing something). Powergen’s advice appeared to be the least persuasive, with only 29% of callers feeling they might install some measures which had been advised.

(See Tables 22A and 22B)

Likely take-up of Grants etc.

We also asked our mystery shoppers if they felt they might take up any of the grants or EEC schemes on offer. Only 42% of our callers were sent any information on grants, subsidies or free energy saving measures (compared to 30% in 2002) and only 10% felt they would apply for any of these schemes (compared to 5% in 2002). Our callers main reasons for not applying were that they felt that they were not eligible, or because they felt that their home was already quite energy efficient.

(See Tables 22A and 22B)

Overall Usefulness of Advice

Although our mystery shoppers were not all “real” customers with “real” problems, they had been playing that role in this research, and most were “real customers” of these companies.

We had also pre-selected our assessors to ensure that some did have some of the problems they were portraying. We therefore felt it would be worthwhile to ask them to rate the “usefulness” of advice as if they had all been real customers with the problems they had described. So we asked them to record how useful they felt all the advice (both verbal and printed) which they received from these helplines would be to them in the personal circumstances which they described in their scenarios.

As Table 21 (below) shows, there has been an overall improvement in the “usefulness of advice” given by these services – up from a score of 66 in 2002 to 74 in 2003. There have also been significant improvements in the overall “usefulness of advice” ratings for some of these companies. The improvement at Scottish Power is most marked, but both Powergen and npower have brought their overall standards up to the levels achieved by the best parts of their group last year.

TABLE 21 OVERALL "USEFULNESS OF ADVICE" SCORE (Max 100)	JAN/FEB 2002		SEPT 2003	
	Score (Max 100)	% of callers who rated advice “not very” or “not at all useful”	Score (Max 100)	% of callers who rated advice “not very” or “not at all useful”
ALL SUPPLIERS	66	22%	74	10%
British Gas	67	26%	73	15%
EDF Energy	n/a	n/a	83	0%
London/SWEB	74	13%	n/a	n/a
Seaboard	81	4%	n/a	n/a
npower	61	25%	73	12%
Yorkshire	71	11%	n/a	n/a
Northern	74	10%	n/a	n/a
Powergen/TXU	n/a	n/a	70	13%
Powergen	70	17%	n/a	n/a
TXU Energi	56	26%	n/a	n/a
Scottish & Southern	73	7%	72	8%
Scottish Power	56	40%	73	11%
Manweb	35	72%	n/a	n/a
Atlantic	n/a	n/a	67	25%

There has also been a drop in the number of callers who felt the advice they received was “not very” or “not at all useful” – down from 22% in 2002 to 10% in 2003 – and there is now no company where more than 15% of callers feel that the advice is not useful.

(See Tables 22A and 22B)

Whether companies monitor their Energy Efficiency Helplines

In 2003 we included for the first time a final question for our assessors, on whether they had been contacted by their fuel supplier since their original call, in order for the fuel supplier to see what they thought of the advice or whether they intended to do anything with it. Most mystery shoppers reported that they had not been contacted for these purposes by their fuel supplier. But 9 British Gas customers said they had received a postal monitoring questionnaire, and two Scottish and Southern customers had been telephoned. This suggests that these two companies at least are doing some monitoring within 4 weeks of providing advice.

(See Table 23)

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, JAN/FEB 2002

TABLE 22A

FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	Total		British Gas		London/ SWEB Grp		npower		Yorkshire		Northern		Powergen		Scottish & Southern		Scottish Power		Manweb		SEEBOARD		TXU Energi (East/Norweb)	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Major Suppliers	235	100	27	100	23	100	20	100	9	100	20	100	23	100	29	100	20	100	18	100	23	100	23	100

QUESTIONNAIRES & HOME ENERGY REPORTS																								
No. of Callers returning Questionnaire	47	20	2	7	16	70	10	50	5	56	7	35	0	0	1	3	2	10	2	11	0	0	2	9
How easy callers found it to complete	easy	n/a	easy/ v.easy	n/a	easy	n/a	easy/ v.easy	n/a	easy	n/a	easy	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/d	n/a	easy	n/a	easy	n/a	n/a	n/a	easy	n/a
No. receiving Home Energy Report	28	12	1	4	9	39	4	20	2	22	6	30	1	4	4	14	0	0	1	6	0	0	0	0
How easy to understand is Home Energy Report	easy	n/a	easy	n/a	easy	n/a	easy	n/a	easy	n/a	easy	n/a	easy	n/a	easy	n/a	n/a	n/a	v.easy	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

TAKE-UP OF MEASURES ADVISED																								
No. likely to install any Measures	97	41	13	48	13	57	7	35	3	33	8	40	11	48	13	45	4	20	3	17	14	61	8	35
No. Measures likely to be installed	130	55	14	52	21	91	12	60	4	44	13	65	12	52	21	72	4	20	5	28	14	61	10	43

TAKE-UP OF GRANTS																								
No. sent any Information on Grants/subsidies etc	71	30	4	15	6	26	9	45	2	22	12	60	12	52	6	21	1	5	2	11	13	57	4	17
No. likely to apply for any grants/subsidies/freebies	12	5	1	4	1	4	1	5	2	22	1	5	1	4	1	3	0	0	0	0	3	13	1	4

OVERALL USEFULNESS OF ADVICE																								
Very useful	61	26	8	30	8	35	2	10	2	22	7	35	8	35	7	24	5	25	1	6	10	43	3	13
Quite useful	106	45	14	52	11	48	10	50	5	56	9	45	9	39	20	69	3	15	3	17	10	43	12	52
Not very useful	38	16	6	22	3	13	5	25	1	11	1	5	2	9	2	7	6	30	9	50	1	4	2	9
Not at all useful	14	6	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	2	9	0	0	2	10	4	22	0	0	4	17
Average "Usefulness" Score (Max: 100 – base all answers)		66		67		74		61		71		74		70		73		56		35		81		56

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, SEPT 2003
TABLE 22B

MAJOR FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	ALL		British Gas		EDF Energy		npower		Powergen/ TXU		Scottish & Southern		Scottish Power		Atlantic	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Energy Efficiency Helplines QUESTIONNAIRES & HOME ENERGY REPORTS	159	100	26	100	27	100	25	100	24	100	25	100	28	100	4	100
No. of Callers returning Questionnaire	74	47	17	65	18	67	16	64	0	0	1	4	22	79	0	0
How easy callers found it to complete	easy	n/a	easy	n/a	easy	n/a	easy	n/a	n/a	n/a	easy	n/a	easy	n/a	n/a	n/a
No. receiving Home Energy Report	71	45	12	46	20	74	9	36	12	50	7	28	11	39	0	0
How easy to understand is Home Energy Report	easy	n/a	easy	n/a	easy	n/a	easy	n/a	easy	n/a	easy	n/a	easy	n/a	n/a	n/a

TAKE-UP OF MEASURES ADVISED																
No. likely to install any Measures	78	49	12	46	20	74	10	40	7	29	13	52	14	50	2	50
No. Measures likely to be installed	117	74	18	69	36	133	11	44	13	54	18	72	20	71	1	25

TAKE-UP OF GRANTS																
No. sent any Information on Grants/subsidies etc	66	42	10	38	9	33	13	52	11	46	7	28	15	54	1	25
No. likely to apply for any grants/subsidies/freebies	16	10	3	12	3	11	2	8	2	8	1	4	5	18	0	0

OVERALL USEFULNESS OF ADVICE																
Very useful	55	35	10	38	13	48	8	32	7	29	8	32	8	29	1	25
Quite useful	78	49	11	42	13	48	11	44	11	46	14	56	16	57	2	50
Not very useful	10	6	3	12	0	0	2	8	1	4	0	0	3	11	1	25
Not at all useful	6	4	1	4	0	0	1	4	2	8	2	8	0	0	0	0
Average "Usefulness" Score (Max: 100 - based on all answers)		74		73		83		73		70		72		73		67

MYSTERY SHOPPING COMPARISONS : CALLS TO ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPLINES, SEPT 2003
TABLE 23

MAJOR FUEL COMPANIES/GROUPS	ALL		British Gas		EDF Energy		npower		Powergen/ TXU		Scottish & Southern		Scottish Power		Atlantic	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
All Calls to Energy Efficiency Helplines	159	100	26	100	27	100	25	100	24	100	25	100	28	100	4	100
WHETHER MONITORING DONE																
No, no-one has contacted me	141	89	17	65	26	96	24	96	21	88	22	88	27	96	4	100
Telephoned for views on advice	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Telephoned to ask what advice might follow	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0
Sent postal questionnaire asking my views	9	6	9	35	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Postal questionnaire asking what I might install	4	3	4	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Contacted about what grants I wanted to take up	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other forms of contact	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0

Conclusions on the performance of Energy Efficiency Helplines

1. In 2003 we found that more first calls to Energy Efficiency Helplines got through (76%) than they had done in 2002 (60%) which is a significant improvement. But some customers made several unsuccessful calls before being connected, and one or two gave up after five unsuccessful calls. The two companies with the worst record for unsuccessful calls (and a poorer performance than in 2002) are Powergen and npower, where only half the initial calls got through. We conclude that there is still much room for improvement here.
2. Our most important finding is that there have been several significant improvements since 2002 in the provision of advice by Energy Efficiency Helplines. More callers are now being asked detailed questions by advisers, or being sent a home energy audit questionnaire, so that the adviser can recommend the most appropriate measures and grant schemes and send a *Home Energy Report*. More callers are now being asked about benefits and age to help determine grant eligibility; more are now being given advice on measures to install and behavioural changes to save energy; more people are being told about grants (but strangely not about EEC schemes); and most callers are now being provided with a general booklet on energy advice, and other relevant literature. In short, there are no longer any companies whose helplines appear to operate in the chaotic and haphazard ways which we encountered in the 2002 mystery shopping survey. This has to be good for customers.
3. But the scenarios which tend to attract the more comprehensive energy efficiency advice are those which are the most obvious pleas for energy efficiency help (cold homes, high bills, help me save energy, insulate solid walls, and information on grants). Requests for help to choose low energy appliances or to control hot water or storage heaters tend to attract less comprehensive advice. Yet all these scenarios were devised as possible “presenting problems” which might be raised by people more generally concerned about their energy consumption, and therefore needing fuller help. Some energy advisers need training to recognise these callers too as potentially in need of comprehensive help.
4. Although many more customers are now being given information on possible grants to help them take up some recommended energy efficiency measures, there has been no increase in the numbers of callers advised about EEC schemes. Only one in five callers is told about these (21%). We do not know the reason for this, but with the expansion of the EEC programme to some £150 million per annum, we would have expected more companies to make use of the opportunities presented by energy efficiency enquiries.
5. When our mystery shoppers asked supplementary questions of the energy advisers (e.g. on grants, measures advised, condensing boilers and CFLs etc.) they were usually (but not always) given some helpful and re-assuring information on costs, benefits and savings. But we found no improvement in energy advisers’ knowledge of grant and EEC schemes, nor in the likely costs or savings from other measures they had advised: this cannot inspire confidence in customers. Some energy advisers also knew too little about controlling heating, insulating walls, servicing boilers and blocking up chimneys, and they sometimes gave potentially dangerous advice. We conclude that

some energy advisers still have a lot to learn, and that this should be a continuous process so that they keep abreast of the latest developments.

6. Even if some energy advisers don't know everything about energy efficiency, they were rated as more knowledgeable about energy efficiency than they had been in 2002 (80 out of 100 compared to 67 before). And our mystery shoppers again rated most energy advisers as "professional" and "polite" in the way they handled the call – and more highly than they had last year. Most customers (90%) also rated the advice they received as "very easy" or "quite easy to understand". All these are signs of improvements in the standards of service over the last 18 months.
7. Verbal energy advice (given on the telephone) is of course only part of the process of helping customers to be more energy efficient. Verbal advice ideally needs to be followed up with printed material explaining how households can be more energy efficient in their behaviour, and through measures they install, and one of the best forms of printed advice has been identified through other research as the Home Energy Report. We were therefore interested to see what publications were sent to customers, and whether these included an energy audit questionnaire and, later, a report. We found that Energy Efficiency Helplines are now making much more extensive use of *Home Energy Reports* than they were in 2002, sending them to 42% of callers now, compared to just 11% in 2002. Companies have also become better at sending out a general booklet on energy efficiency: 79% of callers received one this year, compared to 62% in 2002. Most callers now receive most of the promised literature (a big change from the 2002 result) but there are still a few callers (15%) who receive nothing. This is an improvement on 2002, but there is room to tighten up on systems even more so that all callers receive their promised publications.
8. When we finally assessed the persuasiveness of these energy advice services by checking whether our mystery shoppers might install some of the recommended measures, we found that the advice provided this year was likely to encourage more of them to install measures (49%) than had been the case last year (41%). They also rated the advice more useful (74 out of 100) than they had in 2002 (66 out of 100). EDF Energy appears to give the most persuasive and most useful advice, while Powergen's advice is the least persuasive and useful of the large suppliers, with the smaller Atlantic a little way behind that. But all suppliers' advice is now rated as or more useful than it was in 2002, with some very significant improvements by the companies which performed poorly in 2002 – Scottish Power and Powergen.

APPENDICES

Research Methodology

The Mystery Shopping Questionnaire

Mystery Shopping Sampling Plans

Self-completion Questionnaire sent to Assessors

Acknowledgements

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Mystery Shopping interviews

The 207 Mystery Shopping interviews that were conducted in this study were done (as far as was possible) by 173 mystery shopping assessors who are also real customers of the fuel suppliers covered in the survey.

This was achieved by New Perspectives working in partnership on this part of the study with Taylor Nelson Sofres Mystery Shopping, one of the UK's leading mystery shopping specialists. Taylor Nelson Sofres (TNS) have a panel of some 15,000 assessors – typical consumers who also work on mystery shopping projects for TNS. From this large panel it was possible to identify customers of each of the fuel suppliers, and to identify those with some of the actual characteristics of the consumers they were portraying in their mystery shopping scenarios. This was done by circulating a self-completion questionnaire among a sample of assessors (see Appendix) prior to allocating assessors to scenarios.

This use of actual customers as assessors is important, because unlike most other mystery shopping exercises, some fuel suppliers' advisers (especially those at general call centres) can rapidly check whether callers are in fact their customers, and they can ask about and check on the size of their recent fuel bills, and on their metering and payment records. This makes it hard to simulate complex customer enquiries, unless one is genuinely a customer.

In order to cover the full range of circumstances under which fuel suppliers should provide advice on energy efficiency, we arranged that some mystery shoppers would call either the general call centre, or the energy efficiency helpline, with a range of queries. Where callers were promptly referred by a call centre to the energy efficiency helpline, they would call both. This resulted in totals of 48 calls to the general call centres of suppliers, and 159 calls to their energy efficiency helplines – a total of 207 calls. Because of the regrouping of major suppliers, and the amalgamation of call centres, the numbers of calls per supplier are actually slightly larger than in 2002.

Each of these mystery shopping interviews was carefully scripted to provide opportunities for the companies to fulfil their obligations to provide energy efficiency advice. Assessors recorded what questions they asked, and what replies were received. Normally around 32 to 36 calls were made to each of the major suppliers, and 5 calls to the smaller supplier Atlantic. The Mystery Shopping Questionnaire and Sampling Plan are shown in the Appendices.

All these “mystery shopping” telephone calls were conducted during September, 2003, after which the Taylor Nelson Sofres mystery shoppers waited up to four weeks to see what materials arrived by post. Where questionnaires arrived they completed and returned these, keeping a copy. They kept all the materials they received from the fuel companies and returned these through Taylor Nelson Sofres to New Perspectives, along with their completed questionnaires which contained a full record of their initial calls, the materials promised and sent, and their views on the service they received.

Energy company General Call Centres

These calls were made to the general call centre number (which deals with billing enquiries) and were designed to test whether general call centre operators successfully recognise when

energy efficiency advice is appropriate. We normally made 8 calls to the general call centres of each major supplier, and one to Atlantic. The scenarios we explored in these interviews were:

1. When customers call querying “*big bills*”, “*cold homes and an elderly relative staying*”, or asks for “*help to save energy*”, does the call centre offer energy efficiency advice, either directly or by referring the caller to a dedicated energy efficiency helpline?
2. If the customer asks “*what help can you provide to help us save energy*”, what is offered? Code of Practice, other leaflets, referral to Helpline, information about grants and EEC schemes? List of other organisations which can help? What is the customer told? What are they sent? Are they asked questions/or sent a questionnaire about energy efficiency measures already in their home?
3. Is the customer asked about their age/any benefits they receive, to help determine their eligibility for grants? How was this explained? What grants are they told about? (e.g. HEES/Warm Front, EESoPs/EEC schemes, local HECA schemes etc).
4. Does the general call centre operate at night? Is there a computerised telephone answering service? How many steps/how long does it take to get through?

Where our mystery shoppers were transferred or referred promptly to the company’s energy efficiency helpline (i.e. given its telephone number) they then called this number in addition to their original call to the general call centre.

Energy Efficiency Helplines

The bulk of our mystery shopper calls were made to these dedicated energy efficiency helpline numbers. Normally 24 to 28 calls were made to each major supplier, and four were made to Atlantic. The facets of this service which we explored were:

5. How easily can customers get through to the energy efficiency helpline? Was a computerised system used? How many switches/how long did it take to get through to the person able to provide advice?
6. What hours does it operate?
7. How does it respond to queries such as:
“*My bills are too high. I find them hard to pay. How can I cut them down?*”
“*My home gets very cold in winter and I am elderly/have an elderly relative (aged 60+) living here/coming to live here soon. How can I make my home warmer?*”
“*How can I cut down on the amount of energy I use?*”
“*I need to buy a new washing machine (or fridge, freezer, tumble drier) and want advice on which ones use less power.*”
“*What grants can I get to make my home warmer and cut my bills?*”
“*My home has solid walls and I find it hard to heat. What can I do?/Is there any way of insulating the walls?*”
“*I am worried that heating my water is costing me a lot. Is it better to leave it ON all the time or to switch it ON and OFF?*”

“I have storage heaters which don’t seem to keep my home warm but I’ve never really understood how they work or how I should control them. Do you have anyone who could come here to show me?”

8. What advice does the adviser provide? Does the adviser suggest that fuel bills could be cut or the house made warmer through energy efficiency measures?
9. Are they asked questions over the phone about insulation, draughtproofing, controls? Or are they sent a questionnaire to complete?
10. Is the customer asked about age/benefits? Or are they told about any grants or other financial assistance which might be available? What grants were they told of? (e.g. company’s own EESOPs/EEC scheme, Warm Front/ Warm Deal in Scotland) What measures would these grants cover? (Or did they have to ask directly about grants themselves?)
11. Is there a general leaflet on energy efficiency in the home available from each company? (A Code of Practice on energy efficiency is a licence requirement).
12. What is offered if they ask about *“other possible sources of advice”*? Are they sent a list/Code of Practice or what? (A list of other sources is part of the licence condition.)
13. What advice is given in reply to supplementary questions about grants, low energy lamps (CFLs), condensing boilers, cavity wall insulation, controlling the heating or blocking up unused fireplaces?
14. What training do the energy advisers have?
15. What advice are customers given? Verbal or printed? What measures are they advised to install? In what ways are they advised to change their behaviour to save energy?
16. How long does it take companies to send their customers any printed advice? Can they understand it? Did it seem appropriate to the assessor?
17. How useful do callers rate the advice and information they are given? Are they likely to install measures or apply for grants?
18. How do callers rate the knowledge, professionalism and politeness of call handlers at general call centres and energy efficiency helplines?

Analysis of the Mystery Shopping

Because the 173 assessors kept a complete record of each call, and later added to this copies of any questionnaires and written advice they were sent over the next four weeks, and because some assessors called Energy Efficiency Helplines after being directed there by the general call centres, we had 207 call records to examine at the analysis stage - at least 30 cases for each major company, and 5 cases for the smaller company Atlantic. The analysis was done by an experienced energy research team at New Perspectives. Case records were analysed to summarise what advice and information was provided, and under what circumstances (e.g. volunteered or requested), to see whether the advice provided met Ofgem’s guidelines, whether it seemed appropriate to the circumstances reported by the customer, and whether it was in a clear and understandable format. Assessors were asked to comment on how understandable they found the advice provided, and how they rated the level of service.

The Tables and the commentary compare the results from the 2002 and 2003 surveys.

PRINTERS NOTE: 2003 Mystery Shopping Questionnaire to be included here from separate file

**MYSTERY SHOPPING 2003 – TELEPHONE NUMBERS & INTERVIEWS
PROPOSED/ACHIEVED**

General Call Centres

COMPANY	NUMBERS TO CALL	QUOTA	Achieved (Referrals)
Atlantic	0870 0132080	1	1
British Gas/Centrica	0845 6091222 (gas) 0845 7888400 (electricity)	8	8 (6)
EDF Energy - London	0500 005008 (gas) 0800 0969000 (electricity)	8	7 (5)
SWEB	0800 0855800 (gas) 0800 365000 (electricity)		
Seeboard	0800 096 9696 (gas) 0800 0568888 (electricity)		
Virgin	0800 0850000		
npower/Innogy (inc. Midlands, Yorkshire, Northern)	npower: 0845 7906050 (gas) 0845 7145146 (electricity) Yorkshire: 0800 0733000 Northern: 0800 551555	8	8 (6)
Powergen	0800 363363	4	4 (2)
TXU	0800 1950101	4	4 (2)
Scottish Power	0845 2700700 (Scotland/NE/Yorks/E.Midlands) 0845 2727272 (N.West/Merseyside/Wales) 0845 7292292 (S/SE/SW/London/E.Anglia/W.Mid)	8	8 (8)
Scottish & Southern (inc, Scottish Hydro, Southern, SWALEC)	0800 300000	8	8 (5)
TOTAL CALLS		49	48 (34)

Energy Efficiency Helplines

COMPANY	NUMBERS TO CALL	QUOTA	Achieved
Atlantic	0845 330 0648	4	4
British Gas/Centrica	0845 9650650	20	26
EDF Energy (Group)	0800 0969966	20	27
SWEB	0800 3289014		
Seeboard	0800 581255		
Virgin	0800 0967337		
npower/Innogy (inc. Midlands, Yorkshire, Northern)	0800 022220	20	25
Powergen	0500 201000	10	12
TXU	0800 1831600	10	12
Scottish Power	0800 332233	20	28
Scottish & Southern (inc, Scottish Hydro, Southern, SWALEC)	0845 7776633	20	25
TOTAL CALLS		124	159

PRINTERS NOTE: Self-completion Questionnaire sent to Assessors to be included here from separate file

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At the energy companies surveyed:

Thanks to all those Call Handlers and Energy Advisers who unknowingly took part in this survey, by providing advice, referrals and publications to our mystery shoppers.

We hope that this report reminds readers of the ways in which energy efficiency advice is already good and effective and has improved since early 2002, but also of the ways in which it can still be improved and so help consumers use fuel more efficiently and contribute to ending Fuel Poverty.

Robin Sadler
NEW PERSPECTIVES
December, 2003