

No impact from Energy Saving Day

By Richard Black
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The UK's first Energy Saving Day has ended with no noticeable reduction in the country's electricity usage.

E-Day asked people to switch off electrical devices they did not need over a period of 24 hours, with the National Grid monitoring consumption.

It found that electricity usage was almost exactly what would have been expected without E-Day.

Colder weather than forecast in some regions may have led to higher use of heating, masking any small savings.

The event also received very little publicity, despite having backing from campaign groups such as Greenpeace, Christian Aid and the RSPB, and from major energy companies such as EDF, E.On and Scottish Power.

E-Day did not succeed in cutting the UK's electricity demand

Dr Matt Prescott

"I am afraid that E-Day did not achieve the scale of public awareness or participation needed to have a measurable effect," said E-Day's organiser Dr Matt Prescott in a message on his website.

The Grid's final figures showed national electricity consumption for the 24 hours (from 1800 Wednesday to 1800 Thursday) was 0.1% above the "business-as-usual" projection.

Lofty aims

The E-Day concept started life as Planet Relief, an awareness-raising BBC TV programme with a significant comedy element.

But in September the BBC decided to pull the project, saying viewers preferred factual or documentary programmes about climate change.

The decision came after poor audiences for Live Earth, and public debate over whether it was the corporation's role to "save the planet".

Dr Prescott then decided to see whether he could mount E-Day as an independent operation, and secured the backing of important partners such as the National Grid and the UK's major energy companies.

They are obliged by the government to offer customers ways of improving energy efficiency, and some used E-Day to contact people interested in loft and wall insulation.

The event was launched on the steps of St Paul's Cathedral in central London by Dr Richard Chartres, the Bishop of London, who described climate change as a "moral issue".

"Let us remember people in the Ganges delta who are already feeling the effects of sea level rise and climate change," he said.

"The science changes year by year - though rarely in the right direction - but the moral imperative remains the same."

Lessons learned

Dr Prescott had hoped E-Day might bring a small but measurable reduction in electricity use, perhaps in the order of 2-3%, equivalent to the output of one or two fossil fuel fired power stations.

The idea was to demonstrate that numerous small personal actions could make a dent in greenhouse gas emissions.

But, he acknowledged on his website: "E-Day did not succeed in cutting the UK's electricity demand.

"The drop in temperature between Wednesday 27 February and Thursday 28 February probably caused this, as a result of more lights and heating being left on than were originally predicted."

"I will do my best to learn the relevant lessons for next time."

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