

House sales to require energy ratings

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Every house sold in England will be required from next June to have energy ratings much like the A to G categories used on fridges, the government said on Tuesday.

The “energy performance certificate”, which each house seller will have to pay for, will give average costs for heating, hot water and lighting, as well as overall ratings for energy efficiency and carbon emissions.

These average costs will be based on standard assumptions about occupancy, heating patterns and geographical location, according to details of the certificate announced on Tuesday. The legislation in the UK will come into effect two years before European requirements in 2009.

Advice on measures that could improve the ratings in future, “ranging from thicker loft insulation right through to solar panels”, will be included in the new mandatory report.

The new certificate will be part of the contentious home information packs that become mandatory for house sales from next June. The packs, including survey and search information, are designed to speed the house buying process and reduce gazumping. But critics have attacked the scheme as an “expensive disaster” that will damage the market.

Long-awaited rules governing the content and regulation of the packs will be announced later this week, the Department of Communities and Local Government said. It declined to state how much of the average cost of a pack – an estimated £600 to £700 plus value added tax – was accounted for by the new energy certificate.

Plans for energy certificates for commercial buildings have been in the pipeline for a while and must be introduced by 2009 under European law. So far, however, the government has failed to decide what form these should take.

Yvette Cooper, the housing minister, said the new reports would help home owners “do their bit” to tackle global warming. Homes account for more than a quarter of the UK’s carbon dioxide emissions. “You can get this kind of consumer information on fridges and washing machines so why not on a home where the emissions – and the savings – are so much greater?” she said.

The Conservatives backed the principle of the certificates but reiterated their opposition to HIPs as a whole. Experts warned the energy classification of homes was likely to provoke a lot of argument.

Angus McIntosh, head of research at King Sturge, the property agents, pointed out that a badly insulated four-bedroom home occupied by six people was – per person – more efficient than a well-insulated four-bed home where only one lived.

The housebuilding industry welcomed the ratings system, suggesting that they would make new properties look relatively attractive.

The latest building regulations will make new homes 40 per cent more energy-efficient than those that were built five years ago and up to six times more efficient than their Victorian and Edwardian counterparts, the Home Builders Federation said.