

SWIG AWARDS 2013

Application Form

Description of entry

The publication we are entering is a guide, based on research that was carried out at BRE studying the likely consumer response to the introduction of low flow water fittings in domestic buildings. In addition to reporting the research study, it provides an overview of the background to water efficiency policies, standards and initiatives and includes a review of other research on the subject of water use in the UK in a clear and comprehensible way.

Title: Low flow water fittings: Will people accept them?

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Published by IHS BRE Press. Ref FB51

www.bre.bookshop.com

ISBN 978-1-84806-215-3

The research was funded by the BRE Trust, the largest UK charity dedicated specifically to research and education in the built environment. Set up in 2002 to advance knowledge, innovation and communication for public benefit, the Trust uses all profits made by the BRE Group to fund new research and education programmes that will help to meet its goal of 'building a better world together'.

Define Why

Although much has been written about water consumption and the need to conserve water in the UK there has been little work putting the consumer at the forefront and consider their needs and actual behaviour. Thus domestic consumers experience water saving as an issue for the water companies rather than for them and often see water saving as having a negative impact on their lives as evidenced by reactions to initiatives such as low flow taps and showers and low/dual flush toilets.

The publication reviews the current state of play in terms of UK and European policy covering domestic water use and water saving and provides a summary of published research covering areas including:

- Estimating domestic water consumption
- Public attitudes to water economy
- Water efficient behaviour and behaviour change
- Water use standards
- Compliance with the Code for Sustainable Homes

Following from this review, the guide reports on new research carried out for BRE using an experimental test rig designed to examine people's reactions to carrying out common tasks at three flow rates, followed up with in depth focus group research and interviews with manufacturers and installers of water fittings.

This project concentrated on low flow taps because so little is known about how taps are used and what matters in tap performance. Although there is a move to specifying low flow taps and other water use fittings in order to reduce water consumption, little is known about the impact of these on actual use or about how acceptable these are to the end user. The chief objection amongst users to low flow fittings is the extra time required to carry out many ordinary tasks. If consumers find that flow

rate of the taps installed in their homes is unacceptable to them they will change them –it is therefore important for designers to take on board the issues highlighted in this report to ensure that whole life performance is considered.

The intended audiences are:

- Policy makers
- Practitioners and students in the construction industry ie architects, surveyors, planners and engineers
- Manufacturers, installers and retailers of water fittings
- Buildings developers and owners of domestic buildings eg RSLs.

Define How

The report addresses an issue that most people think is obvious and hence not needed. However, this sort of research is vital for policy makers who need factual good quality research to build upon. The work was funded by the BRE Trust who realise that a report bringing together all the current research into water efficiency is considered necessary for the major players in the construction and water supply industry.

The information contained in the report will also inform those who are responsible for developing standards and policies on water reduction such as the DCLG Water efficiency calculator for new dwellings, the Code for Sustainable Homes and the NHBC.

The publication is a hard copy report that can be purchased from the BRE bookshop. It has been through BRE's rigorous quality assurance procedures that ensures that the content is approved by BRE senior directors prior to publication. It has also been reviewed and approved by the IHS editorial team.

How Much

It is too early to quantify the impact of the guide at this stage. However if the water industry takes the lessons from this guide on board it will:

- Increase awareness of water saving issues in the water industry and amongst water users including consumers.
- Enable greater synergy between the water industry and consumers by encouraging them to consider consumer needs and bring consumers on board on the water saving agenda rather than increasing the barriers to take up
- Encourage the consideration of whole life performance amongst manufacturers, policy makers and designers. This will eliminate wastage resulting from the production of low water use fittings which are currently removed by householders because they do not meet their needs.
- Provide a baseline that can be used by the water industry for future consumer research