The Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES)

Information for Landlords

Tamar Energy Community

The MEES Regulations are enforced by local authorities, who have a range of powers to check and ensure compliance. The Regulations mean that, since 1 April 2018, private landlords may not let domestic properties on *new* tenancies to *new or existing* tenants if the Energy Efficiency Certificate (EPC) rating is F or G (unless an exemption applies).

Since 1 April 2020, landlords have been unable to let or *continue to let* properties covered by the MEES Regulations if they have an EPC rating below E, unless they have a valid exemption in place. If you are currently letting a property with an EPC rating of F or G and you haven't already acted, you are at risk of receiving a financial penalty.
If your property is currently empty, and you are not planning to let it, you do not need to take any action to improve its rating until you decide to let it again.

Does this apply to all rented properties?

Regulations apply to all domestic private rented properties that are:

- let on specific types of tenancy agreement
- legally required to have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC)

This would include any assured tenancy, regulated tenancy or domestic agricultural tenancy where the property has been marketed for sale or let, or modified, in the past 10 years.

Are there any exemptions?

The landlord can register an exemption from the regulation if their property meets any of six criteria:

1. All relevant improvements made – up to a cost cap of £3,500.
2. High Cost – would cost more than £3,500 to make even the cheapest available improvement.
3. Wall Insulation – where the only relevant improvement is wall insulation and expert evidence demonstrates this will damage the fabric of the property.
4. Third party consent – if the improvements require third party consent (eg. from planning department, freeholder, or mortgagee) and despite best efforts this cannot be granted.
5. Property devaluation – if an independent surveyor concludes that the improvements would devalue the property by more than 5%.
6. Temporary exclusion due to recently becoming a landlord – exempts for 6 months after becoming a landlord.

Landlords cannot retrospectively register an exemption in a manner that limits their liability for enforcement actions – exemptions should be registered as soon as possible to avoid action.

Non-compliance with the Regulations

Your local authority may check for different forms of non-compliance, including one or more of the following:

- rom 1 April 2018, you let your property in breach of the Regulations
- from 1 April 2020, you continue to let your property in breach of the Regulations
- you have registered any false or misleading information on the PRS Exemptions Register

Compliance notices

If a local authority believes a landlord may be in breach, they may serve a compliance notice requesting information to help them decide whether a breach has occurred. They may serve a compliance notice up to 12 months after a suspected breach occurred.

If a local authority confirms that a property is (or has been) let in breach of the Regulations, they may serve a financial penalty up to 18 months after the breach and/or publish details of the breach for at least 12 months. Local authorities can decide on the level of the penalty, up to maximum limits set by the Regulations.

The maximum penalties apply per property and per breach of the Regulations. They are:

- up to £2,000 and/or publication penalty for renting out a non-compliant property for less than 3 months
- up to £4,000 and/or publication penalty for renting out a non-compliant property for 3 months or more
- up to £1,000 and/or publication for providing false or misleading information on the PRS Exemptions Register
- up to £2,000 and/or publication for failure to comply with a compliance notice

The maximum amount you can be fined per property is £5,000 in total.

Further information

This short guide provides some basic information about the MEES regulation. To see more information on all aspects of private renting visit https://www.westdevon.gov.uk/RentalHousingStandards.

Support available

Tamar Energy Community is contactable on: 0800-233-5414 or via email hello@tamarenergycommunity.com

Your Property Improvement Recommendations

Tamar Energy Community (TEC) is a social enterprise that provides free and impartial advice to property owners and tenants about improving home energy efficiency.

It works directly in partnership with the local authority and energy efficiency installers to support service users to access all available public grants to improve properties. It also works with qualified and accredited experts in planning and managing energy retrofits.

TEC can support you to identify the best approach to make your property compliant and can also advise you on further improvements you may want to make.

There are many reasons to take this opportunity to invest in substantial improvements to the energy efficiency of your property.

- More energy efficient properties benefit from reduced voids.
- Tenants living in more efficient properties are more comfortable, healthy and pay lower energy bills.
- Properties that are more energy efficient are more valuable and desirable assets.
- Well-planned energy retrofits can reduce frequent problem issues like damp and mould.
- The Government has set long term targets of improving privately rented properties to EPC grade C by 2030 where practical, cost effective and affordable, so further obligations on landlords beyond the existing EPC grade E are likely to be required in the coming years.

The following information has been formulated from EPC data regarding properties in the area. It includes a list of suggested measures you could implement to increase your property's energy efficiency.

Please be aware that EPC data is limited, contact TEC for more property specific advice.

Insulation improvement options for your property:

Improving the insulation for the property can vastly improve the level of comfort for inhabitants, reduce condensation and reduce the level of heating required to keep the home warm. Insulation improvements tend to last for the lifetime of the property, so can seem quite expensive but in comparison to heating improvements or other technologies they will last much longer.

See below in Section 'Examples of Recommended Measures' for the various types of insulation which may be applicable.

Heating system improvement options for your property:

Changing the heating system in a home can vastly reduce the cost of heating. This is because of the different costs of heating fuels, the different efficiencies of heating systems and the level of control over the heating to avoid over-heating the home or heating when it is not required. An average semi-detached home heated using gas central heating or a well-designed heat pump would cost £700 to keep warm. The same house heated with modern storage heaters would be £1,200 and using electric panel heaters this would be over £2,000.

See below in Section 'Examples of Recommended Measures' for the various types of heating system improvement options which may be applicable.

Other improvement options for your property:

Cutting draughts
Although some ventilation is important in the house, uncontrolled ventilation can make the house cold. Draught proofing is a simple and cheap intervention that can have a significant impact on tenant comfort and the condition of your property. This will not significantly impact your EPC but will make for a warmer, less damp home if combined with ventilation.

Improving the ventilation in your property

Condensation is an issue in many rental properties. To reduce, or avoid condensation issues, properties need a combination of heating and ventilation. Rental properties are often more densely populated than standard and the level of ventilation needed is simply not achievable through window opening alone (without compromising the ability to heat).

While energy saving improvements will improve the temperature in the home, they can also reduce the total ventilation. If the property already suffers from condensation, some form of mechanical ventilation is advised and is strongly advised if you are planning further energy efficiency improvements. Examples of ventilation improvements are:

Extractor fans
It is best practice to have extractor fans in all kitchens and bathrooms. They are a simple improvement that removes significant moisture from a house at source. Although fans are available from £10, selecting a fan that emits less than 30db of sound, extracts over 90m^3/hr (250 m^3/hr for kitchens) and has a backdraught stopper fitted, will result in better performance and reduces the chance of a tenant turning it off. Expect to spend £50 or more for the fan and £100-£300 for installation by an electrician.

Mechanical Extract Ventilation (MEVs)
MEVs are like extractor fans (and can act as a like-for-like replacement) but they can run continuously and adjust the rate of extraction according to the humidity levels. They tend to provide more ventilation overall to properties. Installation costs are the same as extractor fans but the fans themselves cost in the range of £100-£200.

Single Room Mechanical Extraction with Heat Recovery (SR-MVHR)
These work like the MEVs but in addition to extracting air they blow fresh air in. They recover up to 70% of the heat from the extract air to pre-warm the incoming air. Installation is not much more than for an extractor fan, however the units themselves cost in the region of £200-£300. The additional cost of these units is more likely to be worthwhile in a property that is already quite airtight. In these circumstances it will provide ventilation while also cooling the property.

Accessing grants to fund energy upgrades

Grant programmes for energy saving improvements usually come with conditions that ensure landlords cannot access grant funding to meet their legal obligations. This means landlords will not usually be able to access support to install, repair or replace heating systems (apart from renewable heating) or to raise the EPC level from a F or G rating to an E rating. However, once homes have achieved EPC Grade E, there are several routes a landlord could take to access grants to further upgrade their properties.

Energy Company Obligation funding – ECO funding is provided by energy supply companies. Grants available are based on the eligibility of the tenants in the property. They must evidence a total household income of less than

£31k gross. ECO funding typically funds simple insulation measures such as loft, cavity, and floor insulation. It can provide help to upgrade boilers, but this is not available in privately rented homes. ECO grants are currently being reformed and will change over the second half of 2022.

Local authority funding – Local authorities have been invited to bid for funds from central government to deliver schemes. Tamar Energy Community is working with West Devon Borough Council/S. Hams District Council and Devon County Council and other partners to deliver the Sustainable Warmth scheme. The scheme will launch in spring 2022. This will provide grants of up to £5,000 for improvements with the landlord required to pay for between 33% and 50% of the works. Landlords will receive the advice of a retrofit coordinator regarding measures to take in a property, with the aim of bringing up the standard to EPC Grade C. Register details with TEC if you are interested in accessing this.

Grant funded programmes will all require the use of contractors that have achieved very high levels of accreditation and typically will not allow landlords to install measures using their existing repairs and improvements contractors.

Examples of recommended measures

Cavity Wall Insulation (CWI)

Most properties built after the 1920s were built with cavity walls. These helped to keep the inside of homes drier, however with the right materials this cavity can be safely filled to make your home warmer too. Polystyrene beads or blown mineral wool are blown into the gap in between the inner and outer walls. Beads are accepted to be the better option particularly in exposed locations and are injected with glue to keep them from flowing out in the future. Many installers offer a 25-year warranty covering any problems with the product or installation.

Comfort benefit:	High
Disruption:	Low
Impact on EPC:	High
Average cost:	£10/m^2, £500-£1000 per property

Internal Wall Insulation (IWI)

In homes built before 1920 and in some non-standard construction newer homes, it is not possible to insulate a cavity in the wall and insulation must be applied either to the outside or inside of the wall.
For internal wall insulation, insulation would be fitted to the inside of the exterior walls with plaster then fitted over the top. Overall, this would take an extra 50-100mm (the width of a double radiator) from the room. In rooms such as bathrooms or kitchens existing fixtures will need to be taken off walls and remounted, with fresh tiling or finishes applied.

The most common (and cheapest) approach is to use rigid insulation boards cut to size in the house. This type of system can be susceptible to trapped condensation or damp if not installed carefully and can be highly disruptive. However, there are manufacturers that produce breathable insulation such as cork or wood fibre that carry less risks and other manufacturers that prefabricate panels to size, meaning a room can be insulated in a day.
Insurance backed warranties are available for this work from some installers.

Comfort benefit: High

Disruption: High
Impact on EPC: High
Average cost: £70-£170 per m^2 , £5,000-£10,000 per property

External Wall Insulation (EWI)

In homes built before 1920 and in some non-standard construction newer homes, it is not possible to insulate a cavity in the wall and insulation must be applied either to the outside or inside of the wall.
For external wall insulation boards of insulation would be fitted to the outside of the property with a render applied over the top of this. Downpipes or guttering would be extended and often replaced to allow for insulation behind. There are multiple materials for insulation from expanded polystyrene to breathable natural materials (with the latter coming at a cost premium but carrying less risk for older properties).
In many houses external insulation provides better outcomes and fewer risks than internal insulation, however some terraced houses can be better to insulate internally.

Comfort benefit: High
Disruption: Medium
Impact on EPC: High
Average cost: £125/m^2, £8,000 - £20,000 per property

Party Cavity Wall Insulation

In some semi-detached or terraced houses with a cavity wall, the wall dividing the property to the neighbour's is a cavity wall with a gap in the middle. This could be insulated with Polystyrene beads, blown in with glue. You could receive a 25-year guarantee.

Comfort benefit: Medium
Disruption: Low
Impact on EPC: Low
Average cost: £400

Loft Insulation

Rolls of mineral wool insulation would be laid to a height of 300mm (12") on the floor of the loft. Any existing boarding and items stored in the loft would need removing beforehand, however many installers can put in boarding above the new insulation and other basic maintenance and improvements like loft hatches or ladders alongside the install.

Comfort benefit: High (if no existing insulation), Low (if insulation already at least 50mm)
Disruption: Low (unless loft space is heavily used for storage)
Impact on EPC: High (if no existing insulation, Low (if insulation already at least 50mm)
Average cost: £6-£10/m^2 , £300-£600 per home

Room in Roof Insulation

Many old loft conversions or properties that were initially built with accommodation in the loft are very poorly insulated (if at all). As hot air rises this means that a lot of heat is escaping the home. To insulate these homes, the plasterboard sloped ceilings of the loft room would be removed,

insulation will then be laid in between the rafters with a layer of insulated plasterboard fitted over the top of this. The ceiling will drop by about 50mm (2”).

Comfort benefit: High
Disruption: High
Impact on EPC: Medium
Average cost: £2,000 - £8,000

Flat Roof Insulation

Flat roofs are typically quite poorly insulated, particularly older flat roofs. Insulation would be fitted on top of the existing roof structure and a new waterproofing layer would be added on top of this. A warranty is often offered for this new roofing structure.

Comfort benefit: High
Disruption: High
Impact on EPC: Medium
Average cost: £100-£300/m^2

Under Floor Insulation

To install floor insulation, installers will have to get underneath the floorboards on the ground floor of the house. This is most easily achieved if there is a basement but alternatively, installers can cut a hatch in the floorboards. In many cases, a better finish is achieved by removing existing flooring.
A good alternative option for some homes is to install Airex Airbricks. These are smart airbricks, which only ventilate your under-floor void when humidity levels require it, increasing the average temperature under your floor and reducing draughts. These are easy to fit if you have modern, standard sized airbricks.

Comfort benefit: High
Disruption: Medium (if under floor is accessible or hatch is possible)
High (if removing floorboards)
Impact on EPC: Medium
Average price: £25-£60/m^2 , £1,000 - £6,000 per home

Solar PV

Solar Panels would be installed on the roof. These would generate electricity which tenants can use or sell back to the energy grid. To sell to the grid a smart meter and sign up with a particular energy company would be required, after which they will pay quarterly. Solar panels often benefit tenants who are at home in the day more than those who will be at work. If there is a hot water tank, you may be able to install a device that uses any excess solar electricity to heat up the tank.

When installed, solar panels should last for 25 years on the roof, but keep in mind that if you will need to do any work to the roof in that time you will need to remove and reinstall the panels. That will add to the cost. It is worth being confident that the roof is in full working order before installing panels onto it.

Comfort benefit: None
Disruption: Medium
Impact on EPC: High

Average cost: £4000-£5000

Heating Controls

Heating controls allow tenants to maintain a comfortable temperature in the home without overheating. Choices range from 'smart' controls, such as a Nest, that can be operated by an intuitive app or a more traditional wireless programmable thermostat. If the boiler in the house is new it is often worth updating the heating controls, particularly if the boiler is 'Opentherm' compatible. Opentherm is a technology that allows the thermostat and the boiler to communicate much more effectively to save energy that many boiler and heating control manufacturers have adopted.

Comfort benefit: Minor – likely to maintain an even temperature rather than zigzagging between hot and cold
Disruption: Low
Impact on EPC: Low (replacing thermostat), Medium (installing thermostat)
Average cost: £150-£300

Air Source Heat Pump

Air source heat pumps are a form of electric heating that use the same technology as a fridge to move heat from outside to inside (even if outside is much colder than inside). In comparison to heating with electric radiators, they provide 2-3 times more heat for every unit of electricity, making them the cheapest form of electric heating and one of the most environmentally friendly ways to heat.

The installer would need to put a unit outside the house (that looks like an air conditioning unit) and would need some space inside the house for a water tank and any associated wiring and plumbing. The home would then be heated by a central heating system with radiators or under floor heating.

Comfort benefit: High
Disruption: High
Impact on EPC: High (upgrading storage heaters)
Very High (switching from electric radiators to storage heaters)
Reduce EPC grade (switching from gas)
Average cost: £8,000-£12,000 (£4-5k grant available from April 2022)

Gas Central Heating

Gas central heating is the cheapest form of heating to run and remains the most desirable form of heating to tenants and home buyers. By 2035, gas boilers will no longer be fitted, with heat pumps being the likely replacement. For many people, gas central heating remains the best option for now. If the property does not currently have a gas connection, you will need to apply for one, if gas is available in the area. Grants are available for homes where the owner or tenant living in the home is living on a low income.

Comfort benefit: High
Disruption: High
Impact on EPC: High – Very High
Average cost: £3500 - £5000 + Gas connection cost

Replacement Gas Boiler

Gas central heating is the cheapest form of heating to run and remains the most desirable form of heating to tenants and home buyers. If the current boiler is old (over 15 years old) then a replacement boiler will typically work much more efficiently.

Comfort benefit:	Low
Disruption:	Low
Impact on EPC:	Medium - High
Average cost:	£1500 - £2500