



Residential energy monitoring system

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Wouldn't it make life a little less stressful if you knew roughly what it was going to be and, even better, if you knew what appliances - or even which of your and your family's habits - were sending the electricity meter into overdrive? If you did, you could take the necessary steps to lower your consumption and see a corresponding drop in those ever-increasing bills.

They monitor - that is, record - the electricity you're using. So, they don't lower energy use on their own, but they can tell you where your energy use is going and how much you're using. The Energy Saving Trust estimates that by being aware of this and taking steps to lower use can save the average household up to 15 per cent on their electricity bill - and these days that can be a lot.

The advantage of these is that you can see what an individual appliance's energy use is and you can move them from one appliance to another to check out how much damage it does to your wallet.

The advantage of these is that you'll see how much electricity your entire home is using at any one time. So, for instance, you may see the Killowatts going up in the evening when the TV, oven, washing machine, computer and lights are all on and can help you to see what steps you can take to lower it. For instance, you might take to turning off lights when you leave a room, only running the washing machine when it's full, hanging clothes out to dry rather than running a tumble dryer and so on. And remember, all this rationing of energy is also good for the planet.

Monitors themselves won't lower your energy bills - they simply give you the information for you to take steps to limit use of the more energy-hungry appliances or times of day. For instance, you might find that using your dishwasher in the evening is cheaper than running it during the day.

Two more things worth knowing: one is that the information isn't shared with your energy provider - only a smart meter they install will do that. The other is, if you're not comfortable fiddling about with electrical wires, it's best to get an electrician in to install all but the plugs.

The Emporia home energy monitor goes in your consumer unit, so it's worth checking if you'll have enough room to accommodate it in there. However, if you can fit it in, it can monitor not just your home energy use, but how much energy your solar panels are producing and if they're producing more than you're using, how much is going into the national grid. It's the sort of thing that can turn even the most carefree of us into an energy-monitor nerd, checking to see how much free energy is coming from the roof panels at any given time.

This device also wins in that it comes with 16 sensors that attach to individual circuits, so you can monitor the big energy eaters - like your washing machine, tumble dryer, boiler, cooker, etc - separately, sending the info, which is updated every second, to your smartphone.

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This home energy monitor is another that needs you to have a consumer unit big enough to have room for it to go in, but if you do, it has got a lot of the bells and whistles of more expensive versions at a more budget-conscious price. However, you will need a smart home network, such as Z-Wave, for this one to run on.

It claims 99 per cent accuracy, has an almost 100m wireless range (one for you big home owners) and can detect up to 60 amps of electricity at any one time, so unless you're running all your appliances at once, this one should keep you covered.

Once upon a time, homes were built with single-phase electricity circuits, back in the days before we just had to speak to turn things on and off, so most older UK homes will have these. However, now that we're starting to do things like charge our cars at home, 2 and 3-phase power is coming in, as they can handle bigger loads of energy.

If this is you - or you run a business or industrial premises, which is likely to have 2 or 3-phase electric power - this is the home energy monitor for you. Usage data is updated by the second, so you can really see where the energy is going; it works over your Wi-Fi and you can monitor the usage on your smartphone, so you can check what's happening wherever you are. As with other USA-built energy monitors, it does need a fair amount of room in your consumer unit to install it.

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