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Keep cool and carry on

WHY ENERGY-EFFICIENCY DEPENDS ON MORE THAN JUST THERMAL INSULATION BY PETER STAELENS SOLAR GARD REGIONAL MANAGER, EMEA.



The case for energy-efficiency is a powerful one. Increasingly, it is becoming clear that to invest in sustainability is to save money. But while the UK Government is introducing grants and green initiatives, these have done little more than skew people's perception of what represents an energy saving. With heavy focus applied to insulation and heating, cooling strategies have been left rather more out in the cold.

The Government's Renewable Heat Incentive was announced in March 2011 to drastically alter the way heat is generated and used in buildings and homes. What this

fails to acknowledge is that when a commercial building is designed, the crowds of people and electrical appliances that then occupy it are not taken into account.

Human bodies and devices such as computers, printers, coffee makers, toasters and refrigerators generate an exceptional amount of heat and cause room temperatures to dramatically increase. Cooling, using air conditioning represents a huge energy burden that can increase a building's emissions by 100 per cent. So to use it on a daily basis yet take a grant to invest in heating and insulation is a notion most people would surely see as perverse.

The reality of air conditioning is that the energy it consumes often goes to waste. When the sun comes out in the UK, it causes heat to build up through unprotected glass windows. These windows then get thrown open to create a through draught, or in colder months, blinds will be snapped shut to block out the sun's glare, meaning that lights have to be switched on. Either way, this behaviour ends up negating the effect of air conditioning, causing wildly fluctuating

internal temperatures and eating up a large, unnecessary supply of heat and energy.

Such widespread and basic energy wastage should not be allowed to continue. Installers need to offer a cooling solution that minimises air conditioning, allows natural light to enter the building and helps to block out heat, rather than trap it within the building.

One of the most simple and most cost-effective solutions that can deliver all of these benefits is solar-control window film. By rejecting up to 82 per cent of solar energy, window film can reduce internal temperatures by up to ten degrees. Cooling systems can therefore be run more efficiently and inexpensively, reducing a building's cooling load by 30 per cent, or roughly five per cent of the energy bill.

In plain English, this could mean thousands of pounds in savings to many UK companies. While most installers will currently look to insulation as the first port of call for energy savings, more vocal support for solutions such as window film by government schemes and incentives would show them that these savings are just the tip of the iceberg.

