

POLITICS

Renters go back to the wet sarong as landlords dodge energy efficiency obligations

By political reporter [Nour Haydar](#)

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Renters like Leanne are limited in how they can minimise their energy use. *(Supplied)*

Leanne has tried just about everything to keep cool in her rental apartment during Canberra's scorching summers.

Key points:

Charities want landlords to improve the energy efficiency of their properties

Renters are limited in how they can become more energy efficient

More than half of Australia's rental properties are rated poor for energy efficiency

"I've tried a number of things, bubble wrap in the windows and aluminium foil but that doesn't look appealing from the outside," she said.

"On some of those really hot evenings, I've gone to my room with a wet sarong, I've wrapped wet towels around my feet."

Leanne, who didn't want her surname revealed, is electricity and energy conscious, but sometimes has little choice except to pump on the air conditioner as the afternoon sun sears through her bedroom and living room window.

"There are afternoons where there really is no option but to use the air conditioning [but] the poor insulation in the property means as soon as I turn it off any effect of that is lost," she said.

For tenants with landlords who are unwilling to make changes, there are obvious steps that can be taken to help avoid higher power bills and reduce your carbon footprint.

Like closing curtains during the hottest part of the day, choosing fans over air conditioners, setting air conditioners at 25 to 27 degrees Celsius on hotter days and sealing gaps and cracks to keep the cool air in.

But small changes like these can only do so much when the overall energy efficiency of a rental property is poor.

Of Australia's more than 9 million homes, the majority rate below three stars for energy efficiency under the Nationwide House Energy Rating System (NatHERS).

NatHERS data is not the most comprehensive but it does show that the energy performance of older Australian homes is well below that of newer properties.

A zero-star rating means the "building shell does practically nothing to reduce the discomfort of hot or cold weather" while 10 stars indicate the "home may not need any artificial cooling or heating to keep you comfortable".

Research also shows renter-occupied properties are far less likely to have insulation, rooftop solar and window treatments than owner-occupied homes.



Leanne has used fans, seals and blankets to reduce her energy use. (Supplied)

Ahead of last month's Council of Australian Governments (COAG) energy meeting, 40 housing and charity organisations renewed calls for state and federal governments to commit to implementing minimum energy efficiency standards for rental properties.

Director of Better Renting Joel Dignam said such standards would improve the reliability of the national energy grid, reduce pollution and have financial and health benefits.

"What we've seen in other countries approaching this is it might say things like you've got to have ceiling insulation, you've got to seal drafts and have a heater or cooler in the living area," he said.

"These are changes that home owners will always benefit from doing themselves but the reason they are not happening in old rental properties is because the landlord who is responsible — who would be paying the cost — isn't getting the benefits."

Energy ministers instead reaffirmed their support for a plan outlining a "trajectory" towards achieving zero energy and zero carbon buildings — including minimum standards — which will be considered down the track.

The ACT Government has previously pledged to introduce legislation for minimum energy performance requirements in rental properties by 2021.

Victoria is also currently consulting on plans to introduce minimum rental standards, which will be progressively introduced to give landlords time to make changes to their properties.

Heating standards will be introduced first, with the majority of energy consumption in Victorian homes spent on heating.

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