

Saving energy

■ KENT CADDICK

A joint venture between electricity supplier MainPower and energy efficiency company Energy Mad aims to save North Cantabrians \$7.5 million on their power bills over the next 10 years.

The pilot EcoSmartHome project, a world first, began in October with a small number of randomly selected homes in Rangiora and Kaiapoi being posted an invitation to participate.

Fifty households initially chose to participate and the phone has been running hot since a further 500 randomly selected households were invited to join this month.

Each EcoSmartHome starts with a free home visit by an energy assessor.

The assessor calculates the power usage of various household appliances, and recommends ways to significantly reduce this power usage.

MainPower's commercial manager Todd Mead said the energy assessment alone could save each home several hundred dollars a year just by recommending a more effective power plan.

"For this reason alone, MainPower recommends an energy assessment for all homes, even if they are already perceived to be energy efficient.

"This is a step up from the Ecobull projects and is a logical extension to our warm homes project, as a way to make the whole home energy smart."

Ultimately, the EcoSmartHome project could roll out across New Zealand in a similar way to the Ecobull projects.

It is estimated the main North Canterbury project alone could save residents \$7.5 million on power bills over 10 years, while making homes warmer and healthier.

It would also reduce carbon dioxide

emissions equivalent to taking 3500 cars off the road for one year.

EcoSmartHome assessor Matthew Cutler-Welsh said people were becoming more aware of the health and financial benefits of energy efficiency.

"The in-home assessment with a qualified engineer not only gives homeowners the opportunity to discuss options, but also provides a pathway of action towards a smarter home."

As part of the assessment, the assessor would recommend appropriate energy-efficient appliances to significantly reduce the home's power usage.

These appliances included high-quality heat pumps, clean forms of wood and pellet fires, insulation, solar water heating, Ecobulls and low-flow showerheads.

As the project partners had secured bulk deals for these appliances, they would be made available to participating homes at very competitive prices.

A key feature of this project is that participating homes can choose a five-year interest-free finance option to pay for the appliances.

According to Mead, in many cases the savings on power bills would pay for the monthly repayment costs, ensuring households would not be out of pocket.

Smart power: EcoSmartHome assessor Matthew Cutler-Welsh positions a solar water heating system for maximum effectiveness.

