



# Ask the experts



**Ed Peers wants information about installing a wind turbine**

## Wind turbine dilemma

**I'm thinking of installing a wind turbine to reduce my energy bills and help the environment. Do I have to notify my local council and electricity company?**

ED PEERS, WIRRAL

You should contact your local council, as you may need planning permission. If you have mains electricity, you'll need to notify your local electricity distributor (the company that runs the electricity network in your area – this may be different from the supplier you buy your electricity from). Make sure you tell your supplier, too, so that it can amend your standing charge. And if you want to sell back any excess electricity you produce but don't use, you should also discuss this with your supplier.

It's claimed that a domestic wind turbine might provide up to a third of an average home's energy, and you might be eligible for a government grant to help with the costs. But bear in mind that many urban areas may not be suitable for a turbine as wind speeds are too low. You can get a rough indication from the British Wind Energy Association ([www.bwea.com](http://www.bwea.com)) but it's best to take accurate readings, preferably over several months, using an anemometer (around

£50). Also, it's cheaper to save energy than to generate it, so try to make your home as energy efficient as possible, by installing loft insulation and using energy-saving

lightbulbs, for instance. See p6 for more about wind turbines and look out for our report later in the year.

## Lights and shades

**Energy-saving bulbs are taller than conventional bulbs and protrude from the lampshade. Do you have any suggestions?**

DAVID BARNARD, CHOLESBURY

Energy-saving bulbs now come in a range of shapes and sizes and have both bayonet and screwcap fittings, so it is probably easier to look for a bulb that suits your lampshade rather than vice versa. Osram and Philips produce a wide range – try [www.thelightbulb.co.uk](http://www.thelightbulb.co.uk) or [www.lightbulbs-direct.com](http://www.lightbulbs-direct.com). If you

want to use the longer sort of bulb, take one with you when you shop for a lampshade, to see which fits.

## Offsetting schemes

**I've heard about BP's scheme to offset carbon dioxide emissions from driving. How do I find a reputable charity to offset emissions from other things, such as flights or the home?**

MARTIN MILLMORE, READING

Companies that offer this service tend to use 'carbon calculators' to estimate emissions and suggest donations that are invested in projects such as tree planting. They often use different factors to calculate the amount of carbon

## Which? focus on Recycling

### Cut out paper

**Since shredding paper shortens wood fibres, making it tricky to recycle, what's the best way to dispose of sensitive documents?**

If your council won't take shredded paper and you don't have access to a compost heap, think about reducing the number of documents that need shredding. You can now check most bank and credit card statements online and many utilities companies offer 'paperless' billing. You can stop junk mail by registering with the Mail Preference Service ([mpsonline.org.uk](http://mpsonline.org.uk); 0845 703 4599) and contacting Royal Mail Door to Door Opt Outs ([optout@royalmail.com](mailto:optout@royalmail.com); 0845 774 0740). Other than that, use it for bedding for your pet, as we suggest on p57.

### Save as you throw

**I've heard that councils may start charging by weight for rubbish**

**that's not recycled. How would a scheme such as this work?**

A microchip in the 'general waste' wheelie bin is scanned and the rubbish is weighed when the bin lorry picks it up. The technology, which is sometimes referred to as 'chip and bin' or 'save as you throw', is being trialled in parts of this country. But the law would have to be changed before councils could start billing households for the amount of rubbish they throw away rather than recycle.

### Donate your PC

**How do I get rid of a computer that might contain personal data?**

Many councils recycle computers but it's your responsibility to completely erase the hard disk. Simply deleting files won't work, so make sure you use professional data-wiping software certified to the



government's CESG standard. Alternatively, destroy the hard drive – a sledgehammer or bench vice should do the trick.

You could always donate your PC to a charity such as Computer Aid International. For £9.25 it will collect your old PC, data-wipe it to the CESG standard, and send it to one of the organisations that helps people in the developing world. Make sure you ask for a certificate confirming that your data has been erased. Go to [www.computeraid.org](http://www.computeraid.org) or call 020 7281 0091. If the charity doesn't offer

In response to your many queries about environmental issues, 'Ask the experts' goes green this month. We'll be back with our usual mix of topics in February



**Alice Judd**  
**Services**  
research assistant  
Answers this month's questions



**James Tallack**  
**Services**  
research assistant  
Focuses on recycling

dioxide emitted, so the emissions themselves, and the corresponding donations, can differ between companies, even though they're for the same house or flight. Your donation will depend on the projects the companies run, so check what they are to see which you want to support. Only some of the companies, such as Friends of Conservation, are registered charities – check with the Charity Commission (0845 300 0218 or [www.charity-commission.gov.uk](http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk)).

## Staying tuned in

**There's no switch-off button on our digital TV set-top box and, to save energy, we'd like to switch it off at the mains. The**

**same goes for our portable DAB radios. Would I need to retune them if we did this?**

DAVID HUGHES, LONDON

The tuning shouldn't be affected, though, in the case of your set-top box, it may take a while for the electronic programme guide to start working again, as the information it carries is broadcast along with the TV signal. If you switch off an electronic device with a clock you'll normally need to reset the clock when you switch it back on.

## No room for water butt

**I've moved into a newly built house and the only space for a water butt is under one of the**



**Anne Haigh asks why more isn't done to include eco-friendly measures when houses are built**

**outdoor pipes. But if I put it there, it will collect water from only half the garage roof. With water shortages, why isn't this sort of thing accounted for at the planning stage?**

ANNE HAIGH, BIRMINGHAM

The government is currently implementing a Code for Sustainable Homes that new homes will have to meet – though it won't cover water butts. Although you'll collect water from only half your roof, a water butt is still worthwhile. Many water companies offer discounts on them and you can get space-saver versions.

Even without a water butt, you can save water by using a watering can rather than a hose and watering in the late evening to reduce loss by evaporation. For more tips on how to save water, go to [www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk) or call 0870 850 6506.

### SEND US YOUR QUESTIONS OR IDEAS FOR 'FOCUS ON...'

You can contact us by email or post

- [letters@which.co.uk](mailto:letters@which.co.uk)
- Letters, PO Box 44 Hertford X SG14 1SH



**Everyday recyclable items such as paper and glass can often be collected in a special container from your home. If you don't have kerbside recycling, or you need to dispose of more unusual items, visit [www.recyclenow.com](http://www.recyclenow.com) (0845 331 3131), where you can search for local facilities and find useful information on recycling. See p37 for how to recycle white goods**

right mix of 'greens' (vegetable peelings, fruit waste, plant prunings and grass cuttings and so on) and 'browns' (things like cardboard egg boxes, scrunched-up or shredded paper, and fallen leaves), otherwise the compost will be too sludgy or too dry. Worms, woodlice and other insects will be attracted to the bin – these are useful as they help to break down the contents. Cooked veg, meat, dairy products, diseased plants, nappies and pet litter should never be added to compost as the smell will attract unwanted pests.

a certified data-wiping service, check it will accept a PC with a destroyed hard drive.

## Try composting

**What should I do with kitchen and garden waste?**

A good way of getting rid of biodegradable waste like this – and avoiding the methane it produces in landfill sites – is to put it in a composting bin in your garden. If you're composting at home, it's important to get the

## Your say

Share your stories with fellow members

## Hiring a taxi

**Being refused short hops was a common gripe... but taxi drivers also have their share of problems**

### What you told us

**'I find it annoying that at night time on the streets of Leicester many drivers see me and my male friends as a threat rather than genuine customers and refuse to stop.'**

DARREN, BY EMAIL

**'A black cab refused to take me, saying I could walk there in ten minutes. I pointed out he was obliged to take me if the light was on so he turned it off.'**

EMMA, LONDON

**'I'm a London taxi driver. I picked up a fare on a zigzag line. The passenger was in a wheelchair and couldn't move as there was a vehicle in the way, so I had no choice but to pick up on the zigzag line. I was fined £100.'**

COLIN, BY EMAIL

**'You should have included something about taxi drivers who give a service above and beyond the call of duty, such as the enormous amount of charity work they do.'**

STEVE, RUISLIP

**'The distance we needed to go wasn't great but it was clear the driver either didn't know the direction or was deliberately going the wrong way. Luckily, we were helped by a second cab driver. He took us straight to where we wanted and waived the fare.'**

HELEN, BY EMAIL

### Next month

Tell us your experiences of the postal service

- [letters@which.co.uk](mailto:letters@which.co.uk)
- Letters, PO Box 44 Hertford X SG14 1SH