

PART 1 OF A  
THREE-PART SERIES  
**WARM**  
DRY and  
COZY

# WARMING UP TO RENTALS

Heat pumps, modern woodburners or pellet fires are by no means commonplace in rental properties, but providing tenants with an efficient and affordable heating option has good paybacks. By **Carolyn Brooke** and **Sharon Newey**

**HEATING A RENTAL** property traditionally wasn't a priority for landlords, why would it be? If a tenant was cold then they'd just put more clothes on - it's what we all did. The headache of another chattel to be maintained and repaired, no thanks! Providing a heating system willingly just seemed to be bordering on madness.

But times are changing, whether we own or rent we want and expect warmer homes. Adequate, efficient and affordable heating is becoming more and more important to tenants, especially in colder parts of the country. Yes, wallets need to be pulled out for the initial purchase and installation but the payback is good - not only in achieving longer-term tenants but also higher rents sometimes.

What's better is properly heating your rental property is as much about looking after your investment as it is looking after

your tenants, with mould or moisture problems less likely to occur. Also it discourages tenants from using portables gas and small electrical fan heaters which can be fire hazards if tipped over or if left too close to anything. Unflued gas heaters actually create moisture.

When considering heating options, aside from efficiency, it's important to factor not only initial costs but ongoing ones, especially when you consider about a third of the energy supplied to homes is used for space heating.

## HEAT PUMPS

Heat pumps are moderately expensive to buy and install but when it comes to running costs, they are cheaper than other electrical options. Heat pumps have become the darling of the heating world as they are an extremely energy-efficient form

Wood-burning fires are romantic, but they're not efficient

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Heat pumps are increasingly popular with tenants

FACTOR IN NOT ONLY INITIAL COSTS BUT ONGOING ONES



Storing wood can be a hassle

TIPS FOR TENANTS

- Electric heaters are cheap to buy but expensive to run. They are good for heating small rooms and for occasional or short use only. While there are many different models available most have the same efficiency. If using plug-in electrical heaters then oil-filled column heaters are likely to be the most efficient, especially in an insulated house.
- Unflued gas heaters have health risks – they will pollute air with toxic gases and large amounts of water vapour. They should never be used in bedrooms. Portable gas heaters can also be a fire risk, if tipped over or if anything gets too close.
- Firewood for woodburners needs to be dry to burn properly. Otherwise it can produce smoke and is of course harder to ignite. Pieces shouldn't be too big either (less than 11cm in diameter). Be sure to check the wood is untreated wood. Look for good firewood prices in summer and spring.

of space heating (and cooling for summer) when installed and sized correctly.

Electricity is only used to move the heat around, not to create it. Air-to-air heat pumps, the most common type, take low-grade heat from the air outside then upgrade it to warm the air inside.

They come in different sizes and are convenient to use with temperature and timing controls, the thermostat can be set exactly where you want it. Make sure there is at least two individually-adjustable temperature zones as some areas (like living rooms) need to be warmer than others. Sizing right is very important - if too small, it will have to work harder and will cost you more to run.

Running costs, efficiency and performance vary greatly between models so shop around and take a note of energy rating labels.

WOODBURNERS AND PELLET FIRES

For the warm and cosy factor, nothing beats a flame. We all love the thought of curling up in front of an open fire but aside from being very heat inefficient (heat is lost up the chimney), under New Zealand's Clean Air Rules, open fires have been banned in many parts of the country.

A lot of landlords have chimneys blocked so fireplaces can't actually be used, so these days a fireplace is more likely to house a wood or pellet fire. Both modern woodburners and pellet fires produce little

pollution and can heat large spaces.

A woodburner can be a cheap way to heat a home – especially if there is access to free or cheap firewood. But the hassle of obtaining and storing wood (firewood must be dry to burn properly) needs to be considered.

Pellet burners burn special pellets made from compressed sawdust. Pellets are loaded into the top of the unit and automatically feed into the fire, so you can control the rate and intensity of the fire. Pellet fires burn extremely cleanly (they produce less atmospheric pollution than woodburners) but they do require a small amount of electricity to run and usually cost more to buy than woodburners and there is a smaller selection of models available. A fan within the burner spreads the heat quickly over a large area. You don't have to worry about firewood but there is the ongoing cost of the pellets, although you can shop around for prices.

Both woodburners and pellet fires require council consent and you'll also need to check which ones are approved for use in your area. Note also that not all woodburners can be installed in residential homes - the Ministry for the Environment's website lists nationally authorised ones.

Heat transfer kits can also be used with both fires to help distribute heat into other rooms. Both can also be fitted with a wetback to heat water, although not too common in rental properties.

NOT ALL WOODBURNERS CAN BE INSTALLED IN HOMES

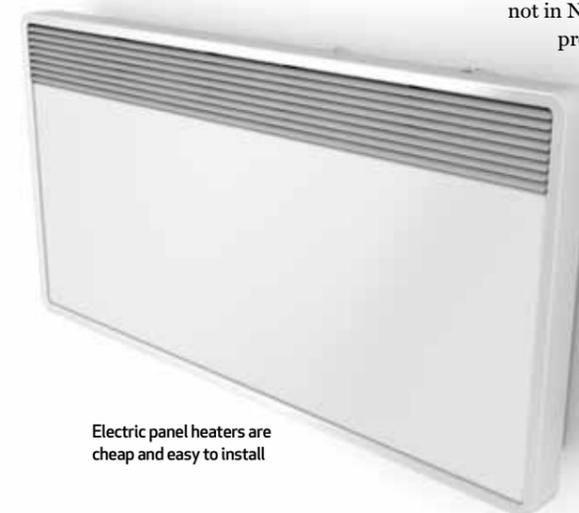
GAS HEATERS OR FIREPLACES

To still achieve a flame fire without solid fuels, a large range of gas (natural or LPG) fireplaces and boxes are available. But they need to be flued.

Generally gas fires have a lower heat output than woodburners or pellet fires but they are instant, a flame appears at the push of a button. Often they are used more to create an effect rather than as a primary heat source. Gas fires are usually more expensive to install and run than woodburners and pellet fires but they are convenient.

Fixed wall panel heaters are an option also if on mains gas. Being fixed to the wall with the flame totally enclosed helps avoid any fire hazard. These heaters can be conveniently controlled and can heat large areas but there is a fixed charge for the gas supply and they must always be installed by a registered gas fitter. It's cheaper to run flued gas fires on natural gas than LPG. Also, people in rural areas pay more for delivery of 45kg cylinders of LPG.

Unflued gas heaters are not recommended (and definitely should not be used in bedrooms) as they can release water vapour and potentially-harmful gases. They also make your property damp by adding moisture. Portable ones are a fire hazard if tipped.



Electric panel heaters are cheap and easy to install



Underfloor heating: Worth the price?

FIXED PANEL HEATERS

These come in two types – mains gas and electric. Electric models can be mounted on the wall and simply plugged in, or can be hard-wired in place. Most models come with fan-assisted heat and convection heat options, remote controls and electronic programmable timers. Slim radiator electric panel heaters are popular because they are cheap and easy to install.

This type of heating gives background heat rather than an instant sort of heat. Made from two cement fibreboards with an element wire laminated between them, you mount them on the wall and plug them in. While they are factory painted, you can also paint them with your favourite Resene waterborne paint to match your walls.

CENTRAL AND UNDERFLOOR HEATING

Central heating is a common form of heating in other parts of the world, but not in New Zealand, especially in rental properties. It is a good whole-house solution but comes at a price.

Central heating uses ducted warm air via grills or warm water piped into radiators and connected to a central heat source like a heat pump or boilers run by gas or solid fuels.

Underfloor heating is another option but is best installed when a home is built. Water is heated using gas, a boiler, solar panels or a heat pump with electric cables being laid between the existing floor and ceramic tiles.

Of great overall importance when it comes to heating, a house must first be well insulated and draught proofed for any system to work well. Remember also that thick, good quality carpet underlay and thermal backed curtains also help to retain heat. ■

FUNDING

HEATING GRANTS USED to part of the Warm Up New Zealand: Heat Smart programme but were phased out late last year when the programme was refocused on insulation.

However, clean air funding is available for houses located in areas specified by the Ministry for the Environment as having significant air pollution problems. These \$1000 grants are available to homeowners and landlords to help towards the costs of replacing an open fire or some older models of wood burners, with cleaner, efficient heating (including heat pumps, gas heaters, and modern wood and wood pellet burners). Be sure to shop around, ask various providers for free, no obligation quotes.

To find out if you qualify, information on clean air grants can be found at [www.energywise.govt.nz/funding-and-programmes/insulation-and-clean-heating/clean-airfunding](http://www.energywise.govt.nz/funding-and-programmes/insulation-and-clean-heating/clean-airfunding)