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Across Europe, combined commercial refrigerators and freezers are estimated to consume 85TWh of electricity per annum, equivalent to the energy required to power over 20 million households.

RapidCool, an innovative project supported by European Union research funding, aims at reducing the energy requirements for cooling drinks at the point of sale, saving retailers money and ultimately helping the environment. The outcome is a low-energy, low-cost rapid cooling technology that enables pre-packed beverages to be stored at ambient temperature and then rapidly chilled on demand.

This device cools down drink cans and bottles from room temperature to 4°C in as little as 45 seconds. It solves the problem of continuously running heavily stocked chillers in order to supply 'cooled' drinks during opening hours. Results show energy savings of over 80% compared with some standard open front drinks chillers and a 54% saving compared with glass door coolers (figures based on cooling 200 x 500ml cans per day). The potential saving on electricity costs equates to €832 per fridge per year compared with open front drinks chillers and €219 versus glass door coolers (electricity price at 0.20 euro/kWh).

The RapidCool concept was devised by British company Enviro-Cool (UK) Limited, which received a €903,000 grant from the EU to help progress the concept to commercial production.

Michael Jennings, European Commission spokesman for research, innovation and science said: "This is a product that will save businesses money, do something for the environment and create jobs. The Commission has pledged to invest even more EU funding in projects that can really make a difference in people's lives."

Kelvin Hall, founder of Enviro-Cool (UK) Limited said: "The development grant from the EU has enabled us to develop RapidCool as a replacement to the existing expensive, energy-hungry use equipment, such as multi deck open refrigerators and beverage merchandisers. We're proud to be contributing to the reduction of global greenhouse gas emissions by developing a game-changing green technology and look forward to continuing to develop the product for both commercial and domestic use. We have received considerable interest from Asia and North America and now want to make European manufacturers and distribution channels aware of this new technology."

The project partners have entered formal agreements with two global, multi-billion euro companies in the fields of beverage distribution and the production of white goods. These products could potentially be used in the home, the workplace, bars, restaurants and hotels to cool a variety of drinks from 150ml canned drinks to 750ml bottles.