

Keep Energy from Being a Drain: Part II

We have already established that high energy bills are a problem for millions of Americans. Although there are cost-effective ways you can increase your energy savings, there are other FREE methods that will help you conserve energy; and energy conservation means more money in your bank account! With all of the other upkeep you have to do to keep your home and family running, try these ways to beat the heat (or cold for that matter) without abusing your checkbook in the process.

The Easy Fix: Turn it Down, Turn it Off, or Clean it up!

There are a number of simple steps you can take to reduce the amount of wattage you use on a regular basis, aside from the traditional "turn the lights off when you leave the room." Most of these tips are simple enough that even your kindergartener can be taught to conserve energy!

- Unplug rechargeable cords when they're not in use. Cords that recharge cell phones, batteries, digital cameras, etc. still use electricity whether or not they are charging your items.
- Keep entertainment equipment like TVs, DVD players, and gaming systems plugged into a power strip, and turn it off when it is not in use.
- Turn off your computer and monitor when not in use.
- Lower the thermostat on your hot water heater to 120° (if you should have young children, your hot water heater should already be on 110°).
- Keep your heating/cooling thermostat at a comfortable temperature based on the season. In winter, layer clothing and keep your feet covered so you are comfortable at a lower temperature.
- Clean or replace filters in heating and cooling systems on a regular basis (about once a month or as often as needed).
- Clean register covers, baseboard heaters, or radiators as often as needed. Dust can prevent the heat and air from escaping efficiently.
- Turn off the overhead lights (which usually have multiple bulbs), and use more focused lighting (like lamps in living rooms and under-cabinet fluorescents in the kitchen).
- Take down those dark draperies and replace them with light-weight curtains. Letting in more natural light will cut down on the amount of lights you need to use during the daytime.
- Speaking of draperies, use them to either let the sun in or keep it out during the appropriate season. In hot weather, block the sunlight on the south facing side of your house. During the winter, open the shades and curtains to allow the sunlight to provide natural heat during the day, but close them at night to keep out any additional chill.

Quick Conservation: Appliances

Aside from the traditional lighting and electricity savings, there are ways to scale back on the amount of energy your large appliances use as well.

Washing Machines, Dryers, & Dishwashers:

- Use cold water for the wash and rinse cycle whenever your clothes allow.

- While your mother taught you to sort by color, you should also sort laundry loads by weight. Heavier towels will take longer to dry, but a load of t-shirts will be finished in half the time.
- If your dryer has a moisture sensor, use that setting whenever possible. Otherwise, make sure that you dry your clothing on the correct setting.
- Even better, air-dry clothes on a clothesline or drying rack, especially for gentle fabrics. Not only will it save energy, but your clothes will last longer as well.
- Only run full loads in your washing machine and dishwasher. Smaller loads use almost as much electricity as a full load.
- Turn off the "heated dry" function on your dishwasher (unless you are using it to sanitize such items as baby bottles, etc.)
- Instead of "pre-washing" your dishes in the sink, just scrape off the excess food. This way, you are not using as much heated water to clean the kitchen.

Refrigerators & Freezers:

- Avoid keeping your fridge and freezer set to a temperature that is too cold. Experts recommend a temperature between 37° & 40° for the fresh food drawers and 5° for the freezer.
- Keep food containers tightly closed to prevent moisture from escaping. Moisture in your refrigerator causes your compressor to work harder.

Ranges & Ovens:

- In a natural gas stove, a correctly working burner will have a blue flame. An orange flame is a clue that there is a problem you should have checked out.
- Make sure that you choose the correct size burner for each pan, and keep that boiling liquid covered! Not only will covered food cook faster, but it will require less energy as well.
- With appliances, smaller is better. If your item will cook in a toaster oven, don't bother using the full oven. If you can warm something in the microwave, avoiding using the stove top.

This is by no means a complete list of the things you can do to help reduce your energy costs, but it's a start. Add your own ideas for energy conservation and share them with a friend.