

# How To Make Your Home More Energy Efficient

By Shirley Good

If you open your utility bill with a sense of dread, maybe it's time to find ways to make your home more energy efficient.

The whole family must pitch in. Remind them to turn off the lights, close doors and shut down electronic equipment when not in use.

When it's time to replace your appliances look for Energy Star rated models that reduce energy consumption. Using energy-efficient appliances helps protect the environment and reduces your energy consumption costs. Make sure you use energy-saving settings on washing machines, dryers, refrigerators and dishwashers.

In the laundry room, try to wash only full loads of laundry and wash and rinse clothes in cold or warm water. Using the cooler settings decreases the energy needed to heat the water. Dry loads of clothes consecutively. Drying new loads while the dryer is still warm helps save energy. Always clean out the dryer filter between loads to maintain good airflow and boost drying efficiency. Choose the minimum drying time needed to dry each load.

By opening windows and using portable or ceiling fans instead of an air conditioner, you can stay cool and save energy. When you must use the air conditioner, avoid placing heat-generating appliances near its thermostat because the heat can cause your air conditioner to run longer. Use your air conditioner's programmable thermostat to adjust settings at night and when no one is home.

Wherever you live, you can use your windows to help cut down on heating and cooling costs. If you live in the South, install heat-reflective film on all west- and east-facing windows that receive direct sun in summer. Using white window shades, drapes or blinds can also help reflect heat away from your home. Trees, a trellis or a fence can be used to shade west-facing windows. For those in the North, install insulating window treatments on all west, north, and east-facing windows.

Attic fans are investments that can be well worth the money in long-term energy savings. An attic fan pulls air through open windows and exhausts it through the roof, which lowers the inside temperature and reduces energy use by as much as a third compared to an air conditioner.

One of the best ways to make your home more energy efficient is to upgrade your heating system. Gas furnaces without electronic ignition and old coal burners that were switched to oil or gas are prime candidates for replacement. Most heating systems are built to last about 25 years. Check with a heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) technician to help you determine if replacing or repairing your existing system is a good idea.

Cleaning and replacing your furnace filters will keep your furnace operating at maximum efficiency. Set your heating thermostat below 70 degrees in winter or above 74 in summer to reduce heating and cooling bills by as much as 10 percent a year.

Improving your home's insulation is one of the smartest ways to reduce energy usage. If you have less than 12 inches of insulation in your attic area, it's a good idea to add more.

Check the weather-stripping between doors and door frames. Sealing air leaks can reduce lost energy by 10 percent or more. Take the time to make sure air ducts are sealed and insulated with mastic or duct sealant, then wrapped with fiberglass or rigid foam insulation.

Did you know that lighting is responsible for about 10 percent of your electric bill? Energy efficient fluorescent light bulbs use 72 percent less energy than standard 60-watt incandescent bulbs.

Heating water is the third largest energy expense in most households and accounts for 15 percent of your utility bill. If your gas water heater is more than 10 years old you should consider replacing it with a newer, more energy efficient model. Turn down your water heater's temperature setting to 120 degrees Fahrenheit or lower until you find a temperature that is comfortable. Low-flow showerheads and water-saving toilets are quick ways to make your bathroom more energy efficient.

There are many other simple things your family can do to save energy. For example, take showers instead of baths to reduce hot water usage. Allow dishes to air-dry instead of using your dishwasher's drying cycle. Take a look around your home to find where energy is being wasted and take some common sense steps to reduce such waste. Eventually, that utility bill will become a much lesser cause of dread.