

How to Save Energy at Home

By Dave Hoffman

If you're a homeowner or even a renter you know opening the electric and gas bill can be one of the more unpleasant moments of the month. Fortunately, there are a few things you can do to keep your hard earned money where you want it instead of giving it to the utility companies.

Dominion, one of the nation's largest energy producers, published a breakdown of how the energy use for a typical US home is allocated. The study showed that 44 percent went to heating and cooling; 33 percent went to lighting, cooking, and other appliances; 14 percent to water heating and 9 percent to the refrigerator and freezer.

Clearly, if you're going to make a real dent in your household energy costs you are going to want to start with heating and cooling. One basic way to control energy is from the source. A programmable thermostat is an efficient way to keep your home comfortable without overdoing the energy.

According to the US Department of Energy you will save up to five percent on heating costs for every degree you lower your heat between the 68 and 70 range. Turning the heat down and wearing a sweater can save you some money right there. Also turn down the heat throughout your dwelling when you are sleeping or going to be gone for an extended period of time.

But there is more than just the heating system to where you set the thermostat. Your mother probably told you when you left the door open not to air condition or heat the whole outdoors. And closing the door is just the beginning. Proper insulation and weather stripping is essential. In addition, it is important to make sure windows and doors close and fit properly (and they are closed). It is one of the surefire household improvements that will save you thousands of dollars over the lifetime of your home.

There is a lot of investigative work involved in making your home energy efficient. Besides windows and doors there are pipes and vents carrying air that should be checked for leaks and caulked if there are any.

In addition to checking for where air might be escaping you should check where the ducts and vents that lead to the furnace or central air conditioning unit. Check the place where the vent is in the wall for possible leaks and make sure that the vents are not obstructed by furniture or

anything that might block airflow. Furnaces and air conditioners also have filters that get dirty and reduce airflow. Keeping these unobstructed will make the heating and cooling system more efficient. Many manufacturers recommend changing the filters once a month.

Another basic strategy is to make sure you don't have unnecessary appliances active. Turn off lights when you're not in the room (again, your mother might have told you that one). During the day use daylight to light the room if possible. The sun is another no cost source of heat. Select light bulbs that are appropriate for the room you are lighting. For hallways and other rooms that don't require intense lighting use lower wattage bulbs. Long life bulbs use more electricity than regular bulbs so they should only be used in difficult to reach places. Energy efficient bulbs do use less energy and last 10 times longer than standard bulbs of a similar wattage. Those spiral florescent bulbs not only last longer but save energy as well. Manufacturers claim an energy savings of up to \$46 per lamp. The use of lamps or task lighting is advantageous when you don't need to light a whole room. Also, take advantage of three way bulbs and dimmer switches that allow you to use only as much light as you need.

Use a power strip for electronics. Many electronics use energy even when they're off. Turning off the power strip will reduce such waste. Only use the dishwasher with a full load. If possible, let the dishes air dry. The same logic goes with laundry. Only using the washing machine with a full load will save on electricity in the long run. During hot weather avoid running the dryer in the middle of the day so you don't counteract any air conditioning that is going on. Don't overload the dryer and make sure to clean the lint trap with each use.

Shortening your time in the shower can reduce hot water usage. You can also lower the temperature of your hot water heater. Experts recommend below 120 degrees. Also visit a hardware store and look into water saving showerheads. In fact, low flow heads are available for all faucets.