



Energy Savings

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Saving energy is something you may not think about until your electric bill comes. Making small changes in how you use the appliances, heating and cooling systems, and other items that make our lives easier can be simpler than you think. With more planning and education on energy efficiency, you can help save energy and lower your electric bill.

Generally speaking, heating and cooling accounts for up to 50 percent of a household's monthly usage. Keeping your system well maintained is important. Changing filters monthly and having the system maintained by a professional every other year will ensure its efficiency. Using the heat from sunlight in south facing windows in the winter will help heat the home up more before the cool evenings come. This keeps the system from working more. Try not to adjust the thermostat on the system more than 2-3 degrees. Avoid turning the system off completely, especially if you will only be gone for a day or two.

In the kitchen there are several tips that can help save energy. Make sure you are getting the most out of your appliance. Try to cook several items at once in the oven to reduce usage later. Use pans that cover heating elements fully to get maximum heat transfer. By thinking ahead and defrosting food before cooking it, you can reduce cooking time by up to 50 percent. Slow cookers, electric skillets, and pressure cookers take much less energy to cook food than ovens do. The microwave is a great energy saver in the kitchen for cooking or warming foods, however, they are not efficient in defrosting.

Most new dishwashers heat water themselves to clean dishes so try to run your dishwasher with only full loads and avoid using the rinse and hold cycle to conserve water. Also, rinse dishes in cold water before putting them in the dishwasher.

Keeping refrigerators and freezers away from heat sources is important. Set the thermostat in the refrigerator at 38 to 40 degrees and stand-alone freezers at 0 degrees. Keep stand-alone freezers as full as possible and in an area that is a conditioned space. This will help the unit to work less. Keep a couple of inches of space near the back and top of your freezer to allow the air to flow freely. Keep gaskets on the doors maintained to avoid air loss. Clean coils under and on the back of refrigerators and freezers yearly, and more often under dusty and dirtier conditions.

Compact Fluorescent Bulbs (CFL's) are a great way to save energy. Most bulbs will have a rating on them and will use about one-third the energy of their incandescent counterparts. The saving on these bulbs comes from the life of the bulb. Lighting is typically a small portion of a monthly bill, and CFL's last about 10 times as long as regular bulbs.

Insulate your water heater if it is not in a conditioned space and set the temperature at 120 degrees. It's important to remember to set both elements at the same temperature. Avoid re-circulating pumps unless they are on a timer.

Install water saving shower heads and avoid running water to shave or brush your teeth. Wash clothes in cold water and run the washing machine with only full loads. Avoid over washing clothes that do not need it, such as delicates. Hang clothes out to dry when it is sunny. Only use the clothes dryer with full loads. Most clothes dryers use built-in timers. By familiarizing yourself with the appliance, using the mostly dry or optimum dry setting is sufficient as opposed to the full cycle.

Changing from single to double paned windows is a large investment. When looking at new windows, try and find standard sized windows. This is much cheaper than having windows custom built. If dual paned windows are not an option, make sure your windows are sealed from the outside elements to reduce air loss. Use caulking and weather stripping around doors and window frames. Also, check around fireplaces, recessed lights, vents, wiring, and plumbing fixtures to reduce air loss.

Check the insulation in your attic to determine how much you have. Typically, new homes have R-38 in the attics, and R-19 in the exterior walls. Insulating can be inexpensive and great way to reduce energy bills. The internet is a great place to find out how much r-value is present, based on the amount and type of insulation you have. My favorite site is <http://www.sizes.com/units/rvalue.htm>.

SSVEC (or your local utilities company) has many tools and resources to help you reduce your monthly electric bill. Check out our website at www.ssvvec.org for 101 low cost/no cost energy saving tips. If remodeling is in your future there are tax credits available for installing energy efficient equipment. You can find out what qualifies at www.energystar.gov.