

Stop energy loss by reducing your energy consumption

By Jeff Knutson

There are a number of different ways to reduce your energy consumption and they don't have to cost a lot of money or require huge changes in your behavior.

One of the easiest ways to reduce your energy consumption involves a little elbow grease, which really only costs a bit of your time.

Start with your appliances. According to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), if you live in a typical U.S. home, your appliances and home electronics are responsible for about 20 percent of your energy bills.

Cleaning the coils of your refrigerator and freezer is a step in the right direction. You should also defrost your freezer and refrigerator on a regular basis if you have an older appliance. Keep your refrigerator and freezer away from heated appliances or heat sources, as well as 3 inches from walls to encourage ventilation.

Another step you can take involves changing your habits. Turn off your computer, monitor and televisions when not in use. Better yet, use your computer's sleep mode as an energy-saving strategy.

To use less water, wash dishes by hand, take showers instead of baths, and do your laundry with cold water. Eliminate small loads of washing, drying or dishwashing as well. Other tips from the DOE:

- Consider air-drying clothes on clothes lines or drying racks. Air-drying is recommended by clothing manufacturers for some fabrics.
- Periodically inspect your dryer vent to ensure it is not blocked. This will save energy and may prevent a fire. Manufacturers recommend using rigid venting material, not plastic vents that may collapse and cause blockages.
- Use the cool-down cycle to allow the clothes to finish drying with the residual heat in the dryer.
- Clean the lint filter in the dryer after every load to improve air circulation.
- Don't over-dry your clothes. If your machine has a moisture sensor, use it.
- Dry towels and heavier cottons in a separate load from lighter-weight clothes.
- Wash and dry full loads. If you are washing a small load, use the appropriate water-level setting.

There are a number of ways to reduce energy consumption in terms of heating and cooling your house. For example, use an exhaust fan to remove oven and stove heat during air conditioning season. Use a fan during air conditioning season so your thermostat can be set higher. Lower your heating thermostat but raise your air conditioning thermostat. Some other tips:

- Lower your water heater temperature to 120 degrees
- Turn on the heat or AC to the temperature you want (and then leave it alone)
- Open and close drapes for heating, cooling & light

- Turn off lights when not needed
- Keep doors, fireplace dampers, refrigerator door, entry doors and windows closed

If you're renting but still paying for utilities, you can still be energy conscious. Make sure your landlord fixes leaky facets. Have reduced flow faucets and shower heads installed. Have weather seal installed around windows and install plastic over windows on the inside. Properly sealed ducts and insulated water heaters also help.

Light affects our health, safety, morale, comfort and productivity. You can save energy while still maintaining good light quantity and quality, however. For example, use the right bulb for the job. More bulbs are less efficient than one big bulb. Use compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) in place of comparable incandescent bulbs to save about 75 percent on your lighting costs. CFLs use only one-fourth the energy and last up to 10 times longer, according to the DOE.

Finally, if you're a home owner, get a home performance test to learn about all the areas you can improve. Insulate your attic, walls and ductwork; install storm windows, or, if installing new windows choose ones with an NFRC rating of U=.2 or lower. Consider air sealing your home to stop energy loss, which will save at least \$200 per year, if not more.

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