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ENERGY - SAVING TIPS FOR THE HEATING SEASON

Saving energy saves dollars and makes sense. There are many good ways to cut energy use, reduce utility bills, make homes more comfortable and help protect the environment.

Some home energy conservation measures cost nothing at all. Others require that we spend money on energy efficiency improvements now. But that money can hold down energy costs all winter long and for many winters to come. So investing now can save a lot over time.

Listed roughly in order of increasing cost, the following energy conservation measures make particularly good sense as cold weather settles in and heating bills start chewing into your wallet or pocketbook:

- Limit the loss of expensive heated air to the outside. Use kitchen, bath and other ventilating fans sparingly. In just one hour, these fans can blow away a house of warm air. Turn fans off as soon as they have done their job.
- Keep fireplace dampers tightly closed until you prepare to light a fire. An open damper in a 48-inch square fireplace can let as much as 8 percent of our heat escape out the chimney
- When using your fireplace, limit the amount of heated air drawn from the rest of the house. Open dampers in the bottom of the firebox if provided, or open the closest window about 1 inch and close any doors leading into the room. This will allow air in for the fire while reducing heat loss from the rest of the house.
- Draft-proof windows, doors and other air leaks. Begin by picking a cold, windy day to test your windows and doors for air-tightness. Make sure there is no air coming from registers near the windows and you'll be able to find many leaks simply by feeling around frames and sashes with your hand. Or you can make a simple "draft detector" by clipping a piece of tissue paper or light plastic to a coat hanger. Hold the coat hanger in front of a suspected crack; any movement of the paper will indicate an air leak that needs caulking and /or weather-stripping.
- Caulking and weather-stripping are reasonably easy, so you may be able to save money by doing the job yourself. Materials will cost less than \$100 for an average house having 12 windows and 2 doors. Savings in annual energy costs could be as much as 10 percent, so draft-proofing your home can pay for itself very quickly. In addition, reducing air leaks to a minimum may also allow you to lower the thermostat on your heating system without causing discomfort.
- Lower your thermostat to about 65 degrees F during the day and 60 degrees F at night. For each degree you turn down your thermostat, you'll save about 3 percent on your heating bills.
- Avoid heating unused areas by closing off unoccupied rooms and shutting off heating vents. Note: this does not apply if you have a heat pump system. Leave it alone, as shutting vents could harm a heat pump.

- Consider the advantages of a clock thermostat for your system. The clock thermostat will return the heat down automatically at a regular hour before you retire and turn it up again before you wake. While you can certainly remember to do this yourself, the convenience and comfort of an automatic clock thermostat may be worth the cost
- One big caution when setting your thermostat back: some older people may require higher indoor temperatures - above 65 degrees at all times - to avoid an accidental and dangerous drop in body temperature. Individuals with circulatory problems or those taking certain drugs (e.g., phenothiazines) may be vulnerable. In such cases, talk to your physician about thermostat settings.
- Keep your heating equipment operating efficiently. Clean or replace the filter in your forced air heating system each month, and check the duct work that is readily accessible for air leaks about once a year. To do this yourself, feel around the duct joints for escaping air when the fan is on; repair leaks with mastic adhesive, as duct tape tends to lose adhesiveness after a few years. Be sure that heating ducts in unheated areas are insulated.
- It's also important to keep the heating system well tuned with periodic maintenance by a professional service. Once a year is a good bet. Proper maintenance and adjustment of existing equipment can improve efficiency by as much as 10 percent a year.
- Insulate your attic floor or top floor ceiling to reduce winter heat loss. No matter how you heat your home, insulation can reduce the load on your equipment and the strain on your wallet. Your exact need will depend on the energy source you use to heat your home and the amount of insulation you already have.
- Learn about "R" values" before you buy your insulation materials; these numbers indicate resistance of an insulation material to winter heat loss or summer heat gain. For guidance on home insulation check with your electric or gas utility company and talk with a reputable insulation dealer in your community or with your local building inspector.
- Consider installing storm windows and doors. Storm windows can be both energy-efficient and convenient. Combination screen and storm windows (triple-track glass combination) can be opened easily when there is no need to run heating or cooling equipment. Inexpensive, temporary alternatives range from a heavy-duty, clear plastic sheet on a frame to clear plastic film which can be taped to the inside of the window frames. Any of these types of protection can result in cost savings of as much as 15 percent a year.

If you're ready to make your home more efficient, call an ACCA member.

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