Winter Energy Saving Tips

Brr!! It's getting cold outside! We're looking forward to the holidays and making snowmen, but not to the big jump in energy bills! Here are a few simple ways you can decrease your energy usage this winter.

Get a programmable thermostat. It's a waste of energy to heat the house while no one is home or while everyone is sleeping under the bedcovers at night. Set the thermostat to increase the temperature in the morning while everyone is getting ready for work and school, then decrease to 55°F during the day. Set the temperature to increase back to a comfortable level when you expect to be home in the evening.

Decrease the temperature again at bedtime. Most programmable thermostats allow you to set a different schedule on the weekend, when you may want the house heated all day.

Decrease your "normal" house temperature. If you usually keep the house at 75°F during the winter, you are spending a lot on energy. Try decreasing the temperature one degree at a time to get used to cooler temperatures gradually. Wear a sweater or an extra layer around the house. See how low you can go. The savings will add up as the temperature goes down!

Let the sun work for you. Open the shades on sun-facing windows during the day to help heat the house. Close the shades at night to retain the heat.

Keep your furnace in good condition. Have your furnace cleaned, lubricated and adjusted if necessary for improved efficiency. Change the air filter to promote maximum air flow.

Reduce hot water temperature. It's not necessary to have scalding hot water. Set your water heater to the "normal" setting or 120°F. Also, insulate the first five feet or more of pipe coming out of the top of your water heater to prevent energy loss.

Seal leaks. Caulk any leaks around your windows and doors. Look for places where you have pipes, vents or electrical conduits that go through the wall, ceiling or floor. Check the bathroom, underneath the kitchen sink, and pipes inside a closet. If you find a gap at the point where the pipe or vents goes through the wall, seal it up. Caulk works best on small gaps. A hardware store should have products to close larger gaps.

Use appliances efficiently. Do only full loads when using your dishwasher and clothes washer. Use the cold or warm water settings on your clothes washer rather than hot. Using cold water reduces your washer's energy use by 75 percent. Be sure to clean your clothes dryer's lint trap after each use. Use the

moisture-sensing automatic drying setting on your dryer if you have one. Keep your refrigerator and freezer full. The food helps retain the cold; empty space requires more energy to cool.

Plug "leaking energy" in electronics. It goes without saying that you should turn off lights, appliances and electronics when they are not in use. What you may not know is that many TVs, VCRs, chargers, computers and other electronics use electricity even when they are switched "off." Although these "standby losses" are only a few watts each, a typical home has many of these items and the net energy loss is greater than you might expect. Unplug electronic devices and chargers that have a block-shaped transformer on the plug when they are not in use. Plug computers, peripherals, entertainment systems and other devices into a power strip, and switch off the power strip when not in use.