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The Energy Efficient Home

[Normal View](#)

High energy use not only has environmental impacts but can hit you personally in the pocketbook. Here is a list of helpful suggestions that may allow you to reduce energy consumption in your household.

- Minimize hot water use by taking shorter showers and washing your clothes in cold water.
- Use your dishwasher and washing machine only with full loads.
- Dry clothes in the sun (check your covenants, clotheslines are prohibited in some communities).
- Try setting your water heater at 120 degrees.
- Close doors to seldom used rooms and turn off heat or air conditioning in these areas.
- Clean or replace heater and air conditioner filters regularly. Keep outside vents free of leaves or debris that may clog vents.
- Use kitchen, bath, and other exhaust fans sparingly. These fans can blow away a house full of heated or cooled air in an hour.
- Keep your fireplace damper closed unless you have a fire going. An open damper can let as much as 8 percent of your heat go out the chimney. The warmth from a fire on the hearth generally doesn't radiate through the house; the heat gain is confined to the room with the fireplace. In fact, a considerable amount of heated air from other parts of the house can go wastefully up the chimney when a fire is going.
- To lessen heat loss when you use your fireplace and the furnace is on, lower the thermostat setting to 50 or 55 degrees. Some warmed air will still be lost, but the furnace won't have to use as much fuel to keep the rest of the house at its usual temperature
- Close all doors and warm air ducts to the room with the fireplace, and open a window near the fireplace half an inch to an inch. Air needed by the fire will be provided through the open window, and the amount of heated air drawn from the rest of the house will be reduced.
- When the heat is on, set your thermostat at as low a level as you feel comfortable. You save for each degree you lower the average temperature of your home.
- Keep windows near your thermostat tightly closed; otherwise it will keep your furnace working after the rest of the house is heated to the desired temperature.
- If you have oil heat, have the firing rate checked periodically.
- Dust and vacuum radiator surfaces frequently. Dust and grime impede the flow of heat.
- Keep draperies and shades open in sunny windows; close them at night.
- For comfort in cooler indoor temperatures, use the best insulation of all--warm clothing.
- Keep your cooling system well-tuned by a professional service person.
- Set your air conditioner thermostat as high as you still feel reasonably comfortable.
- Don't set the thermostat at a colder setting than normal when you turn on your air conditioner. Your house will not cool any faster.
- If you have window air conditioners, turn them off when a room will be vacant for a few hours. You'll use less energy cooling the room down later than if you had left the unit running.
- Use a fan in conjunction with your window air conditioner.

- Don't place lamps or TV sets near your air-conditioning thermostat. Heat from these items is sensed by the thermostat and could cause the air conditioner to run longer than necessary.
- Keep out daytime sun with blinds or shades.
- Keep lights off in vacant rooms.
- Use large appliances in the early morning and late evening.
- Open the windows and use a fan on cooler days.
- Dress appropriately for the warmer indoor temperatures.
- Use cold water rather than hot when running the garbage disposal.
- Boil water in a covered pan; the water boils faster when the pan is covered.
- Keep range top burners and reflectors clean so your stove operates at peak efficiency.
- When using an oven or an electric burner, turn it off a little while before the cooking is done. The oven or element will stay hot after you turn it off.
- When you have a choice, use the range top instead of the oven.
- Scrape dishes before loading them into the dishwasher so you won't have to rinse them.
- Let your dishes air dry.
- Don't use the "rinse hold" on your dishwasher for just a few soiled dishes.

Water Conservation Makes Dollars and Sense

Reducing water use in your home may save you a few extra dollars on your water bill, but there are far more important reasons to conserve water. Water conservation has many positive environmental effects, including preserving fresh water habitats and saving energy.

A great deal of energy goes into transporting water to your residence, and more is used to heat water for your kitchen and bathrooms. Conserving water can prevent some of the pollution caused by excessive energy use while allowing you to save on your energy bill.

When we use too much water, the result can also be detrimental to the environment. Much of the water that we consume comes from underground reserves. If this water is used faster than it is replenished, the land above the water reserves can sink. Once subsidence occurs, the underground aquifers where water was stored cannot be reformed and area that relied on the aquifer will have to find other sources of water.

Following are some suggestions on ways to save water:

- Take showers rather than baths. Showers use about a third as much water.
- Take shorter showers.
- Avoid leaving the water running while shaving and brushing teeth.
- Don't use the toilet as a trash can.
- Use the dishwasher and washing machine only with full loads.
- Don't run water continuously for vegetable and dish washing.
- Water lawns in the morning to avoid evaporation.
- Keep grass at least two inches high to shade roots.
- Use mulch or ground covering plants to prevent excessive evaporation.
- Use waste water from the house to water your garden.
- Plant native or drought tolerant plants.
- Water trees slowly, deeply and infrequently to encourage deep rooting. A slow drip for an hour once a week should be sufficient for most trees.
- Use a broom rather than the hose to clean off walkways, patios and other outdoor areas.
- When washing your car, use a bucket of water or a hose with an automatic shut-off nozzle instead of letting the hose run.

What You Should Know About Recycling

Americans are recycling more than ever before, and with good reason. Recycling saves energy, natural resources and landfill space.

Aluminum is a material for which a strong recycling market exists. Recycling aluminum cans saves 95 percent of the energy that it takes to manufacture a new can. Throwing away a 12-ounce can is the energy equivalent of throwing away six ounces of gasoline. Aluminum cans are just one example of how important recycling is. Recycling of newspapers, used motor oil, non-aluminum beverage containers and yard clippings is equally important to our environment and our economy.

Recycling is truly a cause in which every individual makes a great difference. The way you shop for, use and dispose of the products that you buy seriously affects the environment. So, purchase and consume according to the 3 "R"s: Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle.

Reduce the amount of garbage you generate by buying and using products wisely:

- "Pre-cycle" by purchasing products in recyclable containers.
- Purchase foods in bulk or concentrate.
- Avoid products that are neither reusable nor easily recyclable.
- At work, make two-sided photocopies.
- Use cloth towels in the kitchen rather than paper towels.
- Stop unwanted junk mail by removing your name from mailing lists.

Reuse product whenever possible:

- Start a compost pile with your leaves and grass clippings.
- Leave a coffee mug or two at work and avoid using disposable cups.
- Use blank back sides of used paper for scratch work.
- Look into purchasing quality used items instead of new ones.
- Take your grocery bags back to the market and reuse them.
- Mend clothes and repair broken items.
- Take care of your belongings to help them last longer. In particular, try to keep your car on a regular maintenance and tune-up schedule.
- Use products that are made to be reused, such as cloth towels, sponges, glass dishes and metal eating utensils (rather than paper and plastic), rechargeable batteries, etc.
- Drop off your used motor oil, antifreeze, and car batteries at places that recycle automotive wastes.
- Donate clothing, books, toys, appliances and furniture to charitable organizations.

For more information about this item, please contact Gwyn Donohue at 800-368-5242 x8447 or via email at gdonohue@nahb.org.