

MPUA PUBLIC OUTREACH RESOURCES

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Tipsheet: Fall Home Energy Tune-Ups

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Tipsheet: Fall Home Energy Tune-Ups

Fall Home Energy Tune-Ups for Winter Savings

Now that fall has fallen, there's no better time to think about saving on winter energy bills. A little time and attention to cutting back unnecessary energy use is an easy way to be more comfortable and keep some hard earned money in your pocket this winter. Here are some ideas for ways you can save, at little or no cost.

INSULATION AND SEALING AIR LEAKS

NO COST:

- **Shut the fireplace damper.** Fireplaces can be a big home energy loser. When there isn't a fire in the fireplace make absolutely sure the fireplace damper is tightly closed to prevent up to 8 percent of your furnace-heated air from going up the chimney. Before closing the damper, make sure you don't have any smoldering embers. (**LOW COST addition:** Many dampers don't shut fully without some leaking, so if you decide not to use a fireplace, block off the chimney with a piece of rigid insulation from the hardware store that fits snugly into the space).
- Keep storm windows and doors in place to help prevent heat loss.

LOW COST:

- **Caulk and place weatherstripping** on windows and doors that leak air.
- Install switch and outlet gaskets/foam inserts on outer walls.
- Insulate heating ducts that travel through unheated areas of your home such as crawl spaces, attic and garage.
- Seal up areas around plumbing penetrations on outer walls and basement.
- Seal gaps around the outside of your chimney.

HEATING AND VENTILATION

NO COST

- **Set the thermostat as low as it is comfortable in the winter.** (*Important: Seniors and people with special medical needs should check with their doctors before changing normal home temperatures or considering turning off heating units.*)

- Turn the thermostat down when not at home.
- Turn off kitchen and bath-ventilating fans after they've done their job - these fans can blow out a house-full of heated air if inadvertently left on.
- Check air ducts to be sure they are still connected.
- Close off rooms that are not in use to save on heating bills.
- Make sure vents are not blocked by furniture or drapes. Clean warm air-registers, baseboard heaters and radiators as needed.
- Use ceiling fans to assist in heating. Blades should rotate clockwise when viewed from below.
- Remove trapped air from hot-water radiators once or twice a season. *(If in doubt about how to perform this task, call a professional.)*

LOW COST

- **Use a programmable thermostat** with your furnace to adjust the setting while you sleep or no one is home. In most homes without one, a programmable thermostat can be one of the most affordable and cost-effective energy-saving investments.
- Have your furnace inspected and tuned up before the heating season.
- Replace the furnace filter monthly when dirty.
- Place heat-resistant radiator reflectors (i.e., aluminum or aluminum foil) between exterior walls and radiators.

WATER HEATING

NO COST

- **Shorten showers.** Simply reducing that lingering time by a few minutes can save hundreds of gallons of hot water per month for a family of four. Showers account for about 2/3 of your water heating costs. Cutting your showers in half will reduce your water heating costs by 33 percent.
- Turn down the temperature on the water heater to 120 degrees.
- Use cold water to wash clothes.
- Wash full loads of laundry for maximum efficiency. If less than full set the water level in the washing machine to suit the size of the load, you'll save energy and water.

LOW COST:

- Install heater jackets for water heater *(Do not install if heater has foam insulation).*
- Place foam pipe wrap around warm water pipes *(Keep wrap 12 inches away from heater top).*

WINDOWS

NO COST

- **Let the sunshine in.** Open drapes and let the sun heat your home for free (get them closed again at sundown so they help insulate).

LOW COST

- Install plastic on windows.

LIGHTING

NO COST

- Turn off lights in rooms not being used.

LOW COST

- Replace conventional incandescent light bulbs with efficient compact fluorescent lights (CFL) or light-emitting diode (LED) bulbs.

APPLIANCES AND ELECTRONICS

NO COST

- **Use appliances efficiently.** Do only full loads when using your dishwasher and clothes washer. Use the cold water setting on your clothes washer when you can. 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. Air-dry dishes instead of using the dishwasher's drying cycle. Unplug that spare refrigerator in the garage if you don't really need it. This seemingly convenient way to keep extra drinks cold can add a lot to your electric bill.
- Keep the refrigerator base clean, take guard off and clean dirt and debris from underneath refrigerator.
- Clear the area in the freezer around the freezer fan.
- **Let your computer and monitor sleep.** Many computers come with their power management features turned off. On computers using Windows, open your power management software and set it so your computer goes to sleep if you're away from your machine for 5 to 15 minutes. Those who use Macintosh computers look for the setting in your Control Panels called "Energy Saver" and set it accordingly. When you're done using your computer, turn it off (see next tip). Do not leave it in sleep mode overnight as it is still drawing a small amount of power.
- **Plug "leaking energy" in electronics.** Many new TVs, VCRs, chargers, computer peripherals and other electronics use electricity even when they are switched "off." Although these "standby losses" are only a few watts each, in a typical home they may add up to more than 50 watts that is consumed all the time. If possible, unplug electronic devices and chargers that have a block-shaped transformer on the plug when they are not in use. For computer scanners, printers and other devices that are plugged into a power strip, simply switch off the power strip after shutting down your computer. The best way to minimize these losses of electricity from home electronics is to purchase ENERGY STAR® labeled products.

LOW COST

- For gas appliances, look for blue flames; yellow flames indicate the gas is burning inefficiently and an adjustment may be needed. ***Consult your manufacturer or your local gas utility.***

PERSONAL

NO COST

- **Rearrange rooms.** Move your furniture around so you are sitting near interior walls - exterior walls and older windows are likely to be drafty. Don't sit in the draft.
- Wear warm socks. Warm feet widen blood vessels, which better enables your body to transfer heat.
- Wear extra layers of clothing or blankets in the winter.