

Windows & Doors

On a windy day, hold a strip of plastic food wrap and move it around the frame of each window. If the plastic wrap flutters, the window needs caulking.

Check sash windows for air tightness by opening each, inserting a new dollar bill where the sashes meet and then shutting the window. If you can pull out the bill without opening the window, the sashes are not tight.

Try to slip a quarter under each outside door. If it goes through easily, the door needs weatherstripping.

Switch Plates About 20% of cold drafts come in through electric switches and outlets on walls facing outside. Check for air-tightness by slowly moving a strip of plastic food wrap in front of these switches and outlets. If the plastic wrap flutters, there is a draft. You can insulate these with inexpensive foam pads available at hardware stores.

Fireplaces While your fireplace is cold, place a thin plastic bag (the type dry cleaners use) inside. If the bag drifts upward, your damper is not tight. You may need to install a set of airtight glass doors to help reduce the draw.

Heating & Air Conditioning Make sure your furnace filter is clean. Wash it or replace it once a month according to manufacturer's recommendations. This will help keep your furnace running most efficiently. A clogged filter can cost you money.

Check your ductwork to make sure it is not separated anywhere and leaking air.

Check the air-conditioning portion of your heating/cooling system

to make sure the air conditioner is not accidentally in the "ON" position during the winter. This makes the air conditioner come on to cool what the furnace has just heated.

Do you have built-in baseboard or other radiant heat that is not used because of other types of heat being used (gas, wood, etc.)? Is it turned off at the circuit breaker? If not, it could still be using electricity. Some thermostats do not turn off, they just turn down.

Do you use a portable heater occasionally? If it is kerosene, be aware that this type of heater starts a large percentage of fires and that many people have been asphyxiated from the fumes of these heaters. If it is electric, it can run up your bill if left on too long. A 1500-watt heater used 2 hours a day adds up to 90 kilowatt-hours per month. Left on for 10 hours a day, it uses close to 500 kilowatt-hours in one month. At 8¢/kwh, that's an additional \$40.

Air flows out of your furnace at a very high temperature. Before it is forced into your room, much of the heat is lost in the ductwork. Consider insulating these ducts and your cold-air return to prevent excessive heat loss. Duct insulation is available at most hardware stores.

Water Heaters & Pumps Your water heater is a major energy user in your home, be it gas or electric. Place your hand on it. If it feels warm, you need an insulation blanket (available at most hardware stores). If your water heater stands in an unheated area, put an insulation blanket on it. When installing a water heater, set it on a piece of foam insulation to keep heat from escaping into the floor.

Is your hot water faucet dripping? If so, you could lose as much as 700 gallons of hot water every year. Save water, electricity and money by fixing it.

Hold an oven thermometer under a faucet with the hot water turned on full force. If it registers more than 140°F and you are not using an automatic dishwasher, you can turn your water

heater down to 120°F.

Check your electric water heater for burned out elements. These can cause several problems – high usage, sudden loss of hot water, shock via the plumbing, etc. Electricity can flow through water without heating it.

Although submersible water pumps operate efficiently, there have been instances when they have run continuously without anyone knowing about it. Make sure the tank is not water logged. It is physically hard on the pump and consumes much more electricity than needed.

Refrigerators & Freezers Check your refrigerator and freezer for air-tightness by opening the doors, inserting a new dollar bill where the seal meets the unit and then shutting the door. If you can pull the bill out, you need a new gasket (available at appliance or hardware stores).

Does your freezer need defrosting?

Are the coils clean in the back and underneath? A refrigerator or freezer with a large accumulation of frost or dirt is not operating efficiently.

Do you have a self-defrosting appliance? Frequently check the overflow pan and the coils underneath. If they are full of dust, your appliance could be costing you more money for working overtime.

Place a thermometer in a glass of cold water and place it in the refrigerator. After 10 minutes, check the reading. A refrigerator should not be cooler than 38°F. Do the same thing with the freezer. It should not be colder than 5°F. In a stand-alone freezer, the temperature should be 0°F.

Other Appliances Do you have a waterbed? Leaving it uncovered in an unheated room could cause it to work harder than needed. Also, placing it over an unheated area causes heat loss underneath.

Remember to insulate your whole-house exhaust fan (attic fan) during the next heating season.

If the flame on your gas stove is yellow, it is not burning properly. Remove the burner and clean the outlets with a wire pipe cleaner. Now the flame should be blue. If it is not, it is not safe to use – have it serviced immediately.

Do you have a humidifier? If it runs 24 hours a day, it could use as much as 400 kilowatt-hours a month.

Are any appliances, pipes or other devices in your home shocking you? This could indicate a short circuit – a dangerous condition that also wastes electricity. In this case, contact a qualified electrician for a thorough inspection.

You can take daily meter readings to help you determine the activities that consume the most energy. Average residential usage in our service area is about 1,140 kilowatt-hours per month. This may go up during winter and summer months. Many factors can cause usage to go up – adding a new occupant (especially a baby), entertaining company, etc.