



## Save Money This Summer with an Energy Efficient Home

If the temperatures don't do it this summer, seeing your utility bills after a few warm weeks can make your blood boil. Here are some pointers for making sure your energy budget doesn't overheat in the coming months.

### **Get an energy audit**

Many local utility companies provide free or low-cost energy inspections for your home that could pinpoint potential problems and end up saving you hundreds of dollars this summer. Pay special attention to the auditor's assessment of your insulation, since improper thickness or distribution can cost you a lot of money in lost energy. If you want to check yourself for any areas that might need sealing, hold a tissue near the frames on the interior side of your windows and doors on a windy day. If the tissue moves, you have an area that needs caulking or weatherstripping.

### **Check your air conditioning system before you need it**

The bare minimum is to turn on your air conditioning to make sure it is going to work when the mercury rises. The best bet is to have a qualified professional inspect and clean your system to make sure you aren't losing money because of leaks, dirty filters or other problems. It's a good idea to change your air filters every 30-60 days of use and to periodically check for leaks using the tissue method described above. If you find an air leak in the ductwork, use mastic sealant to fix the leak.

### **Your air conditioner needs to stay cool too**

Like you, the AC works much more efficiently when it doesn't have to battle soaring temperatures. Either move your unit into an area that gets a lot of natural shade or provide some shade with a sunscreen or trees.

### **Get a programmable thermostat if you don't have one**

Being able to set tell your thermostat ahead of time when to cool and how much to cool can save you hundreds of dollars per year. Not running your air conditioning when you don't need it – like when you are sleeping – greatly increases your energy efficiency. Try setting the thermostat to 78 degrees when you are in the home and see if that is cool enough for you. Many people waste energy by setting their air conditioning to a temperature that actually makes them too cold. When you are going to be away from the house for a little while, set the air conditioning to 82-84 degrees. It is cheaper to keep the house somewhat cool than to have to cool it down all over again from an elevated temperature.

### **Be conscious of heat-producing activities**

Cooking with the stove, drying laundry, using a computer and having lights on all generate significant heat inside your home. Consider limiting these activities or at least waiting until later at night to do them. That way you won't have to spend as much energy expenditure counteracting the added heat. In addition, some areas of the country have elevated rates at peak usage times, so waiting until later to use energy guzzlers can help save money in this way too.

### **Turn your windows into money-savers**

Start by checking the caulking and weather stripping on your windows to make sure no leaks are present. Next, add solar window film or sunscreens to windows can reduce a lot of light streaming in. Planting trees on the south or west side of your home can also reduce the sun's impact to your windows. If you need to get entirely new windows, get Energy Star qualified products since the government has deemed them to be more efficient. Some

Energy Star products even come with tax incentives. Visit [www.energystar.gov](http://www.energystar.gov) for more information.

### **Install fans**

A whole house fan keeps the entire home cooler by pushing hot air out of and pulling cool air in through attic vents. Turning the whole house fan on at night or in the early morning – combined with keeping windows closed and curtains drawn to trap the cool air in – can greatly reduce the amount of time you need to have your air conditioning running.

A ceiling fan can also significantly reduce the energy your home consumes. One estimate is that by turning your thermostat up two degrees and turning on your ceiling fan, you can reduce cooling costs by 14%. In the summer, have the blades on the fan turn counterclockwise so the cool air gets pushed downward.

If you use a window fan, set a bowl of ice at the base of the fan to create your own low-cost air conditioning. The evaporating ice will cool the air above it and allow your fan to circulate colder air rather than just pushing around hot air.

### **Reduce the area you are cooling**

You may have been scolded at one point in your life for leaving a door open while the AC was running and “trying to cool down the whole outdoors.” Not only do you want to avoid cooling the whole outdoors, but you also don’t want to cool the whole indoors. If you have a window air conditioning unit, close all doors leading out of the room with the unit in it and focus your cooling power in only the area where you will spend the majority of your time. If you have central air, close vents in rooms where the temperature doesn’t need to be lowered.

### **Unplug that extra fridge**

Refrigerators use more energy to keep food and drinks cool in the summer, so having two or more running at once uses a lot more energy. Plus, having more items in one fridge makes it more energy efficient because a fuller fridge has less space for air and thus less air has to be re-cooled when the door is shut again.