

Cutting Costs: Becoming More Energy Efficient

(NAPSA)—Using energy wisely and taking the time to just check little things can make a big difference in how much natural gas you use and how much you spend on your energy bill. Here are a few tips to help families conserve energy and save money:

Keep the cold out

Reducing air leaks could cut as much as 10 percent from an average household's energy bill. Start by sealing leaks around doors, windows and other openings with caulk or weather-stripping. The most common places where air escapes are floors, walls, ceilings, ducts, fireplaces, plumbing penetrations, doors, windows, fans, vents and electric outlets.

Use energy wisely

1. Set thermostats between 65 and 70 degrees during the winter, and at 58 degrees when away from the house for more than a few hours. While sleeping, add an extra blanket for warmth.

2. Install an automatic setback or programmable thermostat to adjust the temperature automatically without sacrificing comfort.

3. Change or clean furnace filters once a month during the heating season. Furnaces consume less energy if they "breathe" more easily. Use receipt of your gas bill as a reminder.

4. Warm air rises, so use registers to direct warm airflow across the floor.

5. Close vents and doors in unused rooms and close dampers on unused fireplaces.

6. Set water heater temperatures at 120 degrees. This helps save money since water heating is a typical family's third-largest energy expense, accounting for about 14 percent of utility bills.



Making your home more energy efficient could save a lot on your heating bills.

7. Install water-flow restrictors in showerheads and faucets.

8. If radiators are located near cold walls, place a sheet of aluminum foil between the radiator and the wall to reflect heat back into the room.

9. Run washing machines and clothes dryers with a full load.

10. On sunny days, open draperies and blinds to let the sun's warmth in. Close them at night to insulate against cold air outside.

Long-term improvements

• Check to see if attic and basement have the recommended levels of insulation.

• Check the heating system and replace old, outdated appliances with high-efficiency natural gas models.

• Install storm or thermal windows and doors or double-plated glass. A less-expensive alternative is plastic sheeting, which can be temporarily fastened over doors and windows to prevent drafts and retain heat.

For more detailed home energy conservation strategies and energy-efficient home improvement materials, visit the American Gas Association Web site at www.aga.org.