

Subject: Things Consumers Can Do Now to Save Hundreds on Energy Costs

To All:

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Things Consumers Can Do Now to Save Hundreds on Energy Costs

As the colder months descend, consumers should take the time to ensure their home is as energy-efficient as possible. *Consumer Reports* (<http://www.consumerreports.org>) offers these tips for cutting energy costs.

1. Change lighting. Consumers can save money and energy by swapping compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) for incandescent bulbs. Energy Star-qualified CFLs are required to meet certain standards, one of which is that they have to save consumers at least \$30 in energy costs over the bulb's roughly 7,500-hour life to 10,000-hour life.
2. Program thermostat. Consumers can slash home heating costs by up to 20 percent per year by decreasing their home's temperature by 5 degrees Fahrenheit to 10 degrees Fahrenheit during the night or when no one is home. *CR's* latest tests and ratings of 25 thermostats reveal that while programmable thermostats can help save energy by automatically raising or lowering temperatures when necessary, eliminating the need for the homeowner to do it manually. However, confusing controls on some of these devices can cause some consumers to burn more energy than they intended.
3. Boost heating efficiency. Consumers can save up to 40 percent on their annual energy bill by sealing leaks, cracks and gaps in their duct distribution system for their central heating and cooling system. These savings accrue year round and are often greater than the savings from installing a more efficient furnace or central air conditioner. *CR* also advises caulking holes in walls, especially if they penetrate between floors to an unheated basement or attic.
4. Add insulation. Save hundreds of dollars a year on energy bills by improving a home's insulation and the cost of the job can be recouped in as little as two years. *CR* recommends first sealing larger gaps around chimneys, furnace flues, plumbing pipes and light fixtures. Ductwork that is not located in a living space should be insulated.
5. Save money on hot water. Consumers can save up to 5 percent on their energy bills by insulating hot-water pipes and lowering the temperature on the water heater from 130 degrees Fahrenheit to 120 degrees Fahrenheit. For those who need to replace their storage tank style water heater, *CR* advises choosing a model with a nine- to 12-year warranty since these models typically have thicker insulation and more powerful burners or heating elements for faster heating. Further still, they often include better corrosion protection.
6. Replace worn-out windows. Replacing old single pane windows that are beyond simple repairs, such as caulking and weather stripping, can save between 10 percent and 25 percent on a heating bill.

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7. Understand Energy Star. Energy Star appliances are typically more efficient than others and will generally cost less to run. However, consumers should take the energy-use estimates with a grain of salt. Refrigerator lighting, icemakers and special settings on dishwashers are among the hidden energy drains not factored into energy-use figures.

8. Use Fires for Ambience. Wood-burning fireplaces may look romantic and feel toasty, but they actually suck the heat from the home up and out the chimney. Glass doors only improve the situation slightly. Wood- and pellet-burning stoves provide more heat not only because their hot surfaces are directly heating room air, but also because they are designed as a heat source.

9. Avoid Energy Scams. Beware of pitches from door-to-door salespeople, unsolicited letters and phone callers that promise to save consumers big bucks on their heating bill. Alternative power suppliers are unlikely to save consumers much money unless they are using lots of energy.

The Bright & Dark Side of Compact Fluorescent Light Bulbs (CFLs)

The average home has about 45 lights. Changing just five often-used regular bulbs to CFLs can save consumers \$25 per year on electricity. A typical table lamp CFL costs about \$2 to \$3 a bulb; a price that has dropped dramatically since 1999 when they sold from \$9 to \$25. *Consumer Reports* tested a variety of bulbs from GE, Philips, Sylvania, N:Vision, Bright Effects, and Feit Electric and identified the situations and areas in a home where CFLs are best suited. *CR* only recommends Energy Star-qualified CFLs because of the more stringent standards they are required to meet. The Energy Star-qualified CFLs that *CR* tested performed well. Here are some things consumers should keep in mind before replacing all the light bulbs in their home:

CFLs last longer. As opposed to a typical incandescent that lasts 1,000 hours, CFLs can last roughly 7,500 to 10,000 hours. As of press time, *CR*'s spiral bulbs were still on after 3,000 hours.

CFLs aren't right for every situation. Areas that need full brightness immediately should be lit with incandescent bulbs since they can take less than a second to come close to full brightness. The CFLs *CR* tested took between twenty-five seconds and 3.3 minutes to reach that point. Using CFLs for short periods of time (less than 15 minutes) can also shorten their life.

Recycling efforts lag. *CR* advises recycling CFLs since the bulbs tested contained about 5 milligrams or less of mercury, a neurotoxin which shouldn't be released into the environment. Most municipalities don't have residential CFL recycling programs, nor will most of the stores that sell these types of bulbs take the spent CFLs back. *CR* recommends checking with local sanitation services or the EPA's Web site, <http://www.epa.gov/bulbrecycling>, to find out where CFLs can be recycled.

Check out the archives of [Environmental Protection](#) magazine Web site for additional articles related to energy efficiency, including: "[DOE Offers CD-ROM To Help Manufacturers Save Energy.](#)"

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