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News you can use

10 TIPS TO CUT HOUSEHOLD ENERGY BILLS

Efficiency Advice Centre on 0800 512 012.

WASTE LESS

THE biggest energy savings come from insulation, as nearly 50pc of all the heat lost in the average home is through the roof and walls. A further 20pc is lost through ventilation and draughts and a fifth through window panes and frames.

Installing 270mm (10 inches) of loft insulation can save up to 15pc on your heating costs and cavity wall insulation can save up to £160 a year on heating bills. Every energy supplier has been mandated to help customers improve energy efficiency and many give discounts to customers towards the cost of insulation.

In addition, there are also grants (under the Warm Front scheme in England, Warm Deal in Scotland and Warm Homes in Northern Ireland) for cavity wall and loft insulation. Visit energysavingtrust.org.uk, eaga.co.uk, www.scotland.gov.uk or warmfront.co.uk for details.

Pensioners over 70 and anyone on income or disability-related benefits can claim up to £2,700 of energy efficiency improvements (or £4,000 if oil central heating is recommended). The over-60s can receive £300 towards central heating installation if they do not have any or their current system is inoperable.

Even those who do not qualify for government help can save by using low-cost insulation. Fitting a jacket to a hot water tank can cut wastage by three-quarters – a cash saving of around £40 a year – and insulating hot water pipes can save a further £10 a year.

Other low-cost measures include installing draught excluders on doors, windows and letter boxes and it costs nothing to close curtains at dusk and shut windows when the heating is on.

TURN IT DOWN OR OFF

“ENERGY efficiency advice is beginning to filter through to consumers,” said a spokesman for npower. “Gas consumption has fallen by around 12pc as a result. Electricity is the next biggest challenge.”

FIRE IS THE REAL DEAL FOR FAMILY

Like increasing numbers of Londoners, the Cornwall-Jones family from Clapham have started to use a real fire again.

“Our boiler broke down and we pulled out the electric fan heaters to keep warm but when I looked at the electricity meter in the hall I was horrified,” said Linsey, 44, who works in broadcasting.

“The meter was whizzing round so fast that it was obvious that the fan heaters were burning money. And I hated the way they dried the room out.

“So my husband Adam nipped to the garage for a bag of smokeless coal – another sign of the times that you can buy this in London.

“We were amazed at how warm the real fire was, even though it is not that large, and it is much more pleasant. The real fire made the whole room feel warm and each bag of coal only costs around £4. Our boiler is now fixed but we are still using the real fire as a secondary source of heating, which means we use the central heating less and can just keep the living room really cosy rather than paying to heat our whole home.”



GEOFF PUGH

Paying to keep electrical items on standby when they are not in use is unnecessary waste and accounts for 8pc of the average household's electricity bill.

So much of modern technology – from the TV and DVD player to games consoles – is left permanently switched on, wasting an average of £37 a year.

Overheating homes is another waste.

“The average temperature in a UK home in the 1970s was 54F (12C). In 2006 it had risen to 64F (18C),” said Gareth Kloet of Confused.com.

Turning the thermostat

down by 1.8F (1C) can cut energy bills by up to 10pc. A temperature of 70F (21C) in the living room and 64F (18C) in the bedroom should be adequate. Washing machines can be set to 86F (30C) and still wash effectively and hot water does not have to be heated to scalding – 140F (60C) should be an adequate temperature.

BE BOILER AWARE

HEATING and hot water account for around 60pc of the average fuel bill and unless your boiler is relatively new it is unlikely to be

Any energy saving measures taken now will result in lower bills in the years to come

running as efficiently as it could.

Replacing an old gas-guzzling boiler that is 15 years old with a new highly-efficient condensing one along with some heating controls could save around £275 a year in a three-bedroom semi.

A lower cost option is to install heating controls and room thermostats so that empty rooms are not heated and each room is temperature controlled.

Boilers also need to be regularly serviced – three-in-10 households have never had theirs serviced – to

ensure they run as efficiently as possible. If they are not serviced regularly, they produce less heat from the gas consumed, which means they cost more to run.

That is not the only cost. An unexpected breakdown bill can be crippling. Nearly one-in-three boilers breaks down within six years of being installed and yet only a third of households have any emergency heating cover in place to help pay for unexpected repair bills. Cover costs from as little as £5.99 a month; shop around for the best buys from price comparison websites.

BUY ENERGY EFFICIENT ITEMS

IF YOU are replacing any electrical item from a lightbulb to a washing machine – or a games console or new TV for Christmas – check its energy efficiency. All products must carry a rating.

There are two logos to look out for: Energy Saving Recommended – this is on the most energy-efficient products. The EU energy label – this grades products from A (for the best) to G (for the worst) for energy use. For fridges and freezers there is a

new A++ rating.

Also consider size. The bigger the appliance, the more electricity it is likely to need.

MONITOR IT

BUY a monitor to record energy usage – it is the easiest way to see how much each appliance costs to run. Turn off everything that is not essential and see instant savings.

Checking one of these gadgets can become habit-forming, which is why once households start monitoring usage they often make savings of between 10pc and 25pc in energy consumption by changing their consumption habits – for example, by using appliances such as tumble dryers and the dishwasher less often. Visit ethicalsuperstore.com for details of products including the OWL Wireless Energy Monitor.

KEEP THE HOME FIRE BURNING

SOARING energy bills have led to a resurgence in real fires – even in urban areas. Sales of wood-burning and multi-fuel stoves are up 40pc on last year, according to the Solid Fuel Association (www.solidfuel.co.uk).

Smokeless fuel will keep you in compliance with the rules in a smoke-control area and those worried about green issues should bear in mind that wood as a fuel is considered carbon neutral in that it is only releasing the CO₂ captured by the growth of the tree. An efficient multi-fuel fire (half wood and half smokeless fuel) also produces less carbon dioxide than a gas condensing boiler.

Green fuels, such as the Green Dragon logs made as a bi-product of oil-seed rape, are proving increasingly popular. The briquettes burn three times as long as wood and give off twice the heat (greendragonfuel.co.uk).

Stoves are more efficient than open fires, which send most of the heat up the chimney. Before using a fireplace ensure the chimney is swept and is lined, if you are having an open fire. Wood-burning stoves, which can cost £1,000, must be fitted by a HETAS qualified fitter (hetas.co.uk).