

Fact Sheet

PUBLIC RELATIONS
400 N. Capitol St., NW
Washington, DC 20001
202-824-7211
www.aga.org

Energy Conservation Tips To Make Your Home (and Your Wallet) More Comfortable

Most American homes feature the comfort and convenience of natural gas heat. About 54 percent of U.S. households (in all, about 55.6 million households) use natural gas for home-heating. This winter, due to changes in the market price of natural gas, most residential natural gas customers can expect to pay more to heat their homes (especially if the weather is colder than it was during the 1999-2000 heating season). Here are some steps consumers can take to conserve energy and manage the costs of keeping their homes and families warm.

Keep The Cold Out

Consumers can take easy, inexpensive steps to reduce household energy consumption and minimize energy loss. Reducing air leaks could cut as much as 10 percent from an average household's monthly energy bill. For example, consumers can:

- Seal leaks around doors, windows, and other openings such as pipes or ducts, with caulk or weather-stripping. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, the most common places where air escapes in homes are:
 - floors, walls, ceilings (31 percent)
 - ducts (15 percent)
 - fireplace (14 percent)
 - plumbing penetrations (13 percent)
 - doors (11 percent)
 - windows (10 percent)
 - fans and vents (4 percent)
 - electric outlets (2 percent)

Use Energy Wisely

- 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. Bear in mind that warmer temperatures are recommended for homes with ill or elderly persons or infants.
- Turn down thermostats automatically without sacrificing comfort by installing an automatic setback or programmable thermostat.

- **SAVINGS:** *Cut annual heating bills by as much as 10 percent per year by turning your thermostat back 10 percent to 15 percent for eight hours per day.*
- 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 natural gas bill as a reminder.
- Warm air rises, so use registers to direct warm air-flow across the floor.
- Close vents and doors in unused rooms and close dampers on unused fireplaces.
- Set water heater temperatures at 120 degrees. A family of four, each showering for five minutes a day, uses 700 gallons of water each week. By lowering the thermostat on the water heater to 120 degrees, families can cut water heating bills without sacrificing comfort.
- **SAVINGS:** *Turning down the unit’s thermostat to 120 degrees can help you save money, since water-heating is a typical family’s third-largest energy expense, accounting for about 14 percent of utility bills.*
- Install water-flow restrictors in showerheads and faucets.
- 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.
- Run washing machines and clothes dryers with a full load.
- On sunny days, open draperies and blinds to let the sun’s warmth in. Close them at night to insulate against cold air outside.

Plan for Long-Term Energy-Efficiency Improvements

- Conduct a “Home Energy Audit” to determine specific household conservation needs. To find out how, contact your local gas utility for information or access the U.S. Department of Energy (www.homenergysaver.lbl.gov) for a “Do It Yourself Home Energy Audit” feature.
- 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. When buying new appliances, compare energy efficiency ratings and annual operating costs.

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

Bill-Payment Programs

Most natural gas utilities offer billing arrangements or assistance programs designed to help consumers manage their energy bills. Contact your local gas utility for more information.

Special Assistance for Low-Income Households

Low-income households spend a far higher proportion of their incomes on energy than do others. On average, low-income households spend 14 percent of their annual income on energy, in contrast with the average 3.5 percent spent on energy by others. More than 90 percent of low-income households have annual incomes of less than \$15,000.

To help reduce this burden, the U.S. Department of Energy's Weatherization Assistance Program helps eligible households to conserve energy. To be eligible, a household must have annual income at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty level, or 60 percent of the state's median income (whichever is higher). Following weatherization, the average household saves about 25 percent on their heating bills.

Services provided under the DOE Weatherization Assistance Program:

- Professionally trained crews weatherize single-family homes, multifamily dwellings, and mobile homes. Examples of energy-saving measures include installation of insulation and ventilation fans, heating and cooling tune-ups and modifications, replacement of units for energy efficiency and safety; air sealing, and energy-efficient lighting.
- Computerized energy audits and advanced diagnostic equipment are used to identify energy-saving measures that are cost effective or essential for health and safety.
- Tips to help clients understand how to use and maintain their homes and appliances to use energy wisely.

SOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON USING ENERGY WISELY

When it comes to useful information on using and saving energy, AGA's energy conservation 'tips' are only the tip of the iceberg. Listed below are informative websites on forecasted energy prices, detailed home energy conservation strategies, and energy-efficient home improvement materials. These sites can help utilities and their customers to prepare for this winter.

- www.energy.gov: The U.S Department of Energy (DOE) website is a comprehensive guide to all forms of energy supply, demand and usage; it also features energy conservation tips.
- www.eia.doe.gov: DOE's Energy Information Association site is a great resource for pricing and supply forecasts. The "Winter Fuels Outlook: 2000-2001" was issued in October 2000.
- www.homeenergysaver.lbl.gov: This DOE site enables consumers to use a "Do It Yourself Home Energy Audit", calculate energy use, and identify the best ways to save both energy and money. Key in your zip code and receive instant estimates of your energy use or take a quiz that helps customize your home's profile.
- www.eren.doe.gov/buildings: DOE's Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Clearinghouse lists energy consultants, conservation tips, and other information on DOE programs to promote energy efficiency and renewable energy.
- www.epa.gov/appdstar/hvac: This Environmental Protection Agency site enables consumers to gauge the energy efficiency of many of their home appliances and to research EPA-sponsored Energy Star energy-efficient appliances.
- www.eren.doe.gov/buildings/weatherization_assistance/: For low-income consumers, this site explains the DOE's Weatherization Assistance Program, which delivers energy conservation services to low-income Americans.
- www.ase.org: The Alliance to Save Energy has posted some tips on its web site to help consumers avoid "\$ticker \$hock" this winter.
- www.aga.org: The American Gas Association website is an invaluable resource for understanding the benefits and availability of clean, safe, reliable natural gas energy.

For product information on insulation and weatherization supplies:

- www.gamanet.org: Gas Appliance Manufacturers Association
- www.aham.org: Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers
- www.nahb.com: National Association of Home Builders
- www.cellulose.org: Cellulose Insulation Manufacturers Association
- www.insulate.org: Insulation Contractors Association of America
- www.naima.org: North American Insulation Manufacturers Association
- www.pima.org: Polyisocyanurate Insulation Manufacturers Association
- www.nwwda.org: National Wood Window and Door Association