

The Consumer's Edge

Consumer Protection Division, Maryland Attorney General's Office

Issue # 123

"Watts" It Worth?

Energy Saving Tips to Keep Your Energy Costs Down and to Help Protect the Environment

Did you know that although the United States accounts for only 5% of the world's population, it consumes 25% of the world's energy? The cost for the natural gas and electricity that we use in our homes is going up, but there are a number of no or low-cost steps that each of us can take to reduce the energy we use in our homes. By conserving energy, we will save money and help protect the environment at the same time.

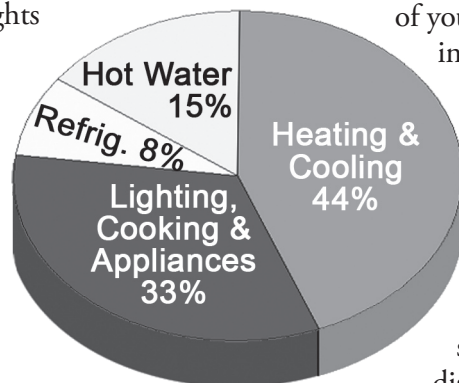
No-Cost Ways to Save Energy

The Power of OFF! Turn off everything not in use, including lights, TVs, computers, and other appliances. There's no need to have lights on and TVs running in empty rooms. Lighting, cooking and other appliances account for approximately 33% of your home's energy dollars, while major appliances, like your refrigerator, account for 8% of your home's energy dollars. Some appliances, such as TVs, computers, DVD players, CD players, coffee makers, and microwaves consume energy even when not in use. Consider unplugging those appliances when you are away on vacation.

So Full and So Clean Do only full loads when using the washing machine, dryer and dishwasher. Use cold water for your laundry loads. As much as 85% of the energy used in your washing machine goes to heating the water. Switching the temperature setting from hot to cold can cut a load's energy use by more than half. Many detergent companies make laundry soaps that are specially formulated for cold water. Clean the lint filter after every load in your clothes dryer for bet-

ter air circulation. Consider hanging up your clothes to dry or select the no heat cycle. Select the air dry option instead of the heated dry when using your dishwasher.

Let the Light In (Or Out) and Take a Breath of Fresh Air During the winter months, keep your window coverings open to let the sun in to warm your home. In the summer, close the window covers to keep the indoors shaded and cooled—your air conditioner won't work as hard. During the air conditioning season, take advantage of every cool spell and open the windows to cool your home. Your air conditioner is a big energy user.



Where Your Home's Energy Goes

Water, Water, Everywhere Approximately 15% of your home energy bill goes to water heating. Lower your water heater temperature to 120°F instead of 140°F. Take short showers instead of baths—showers use about 50% less water. Do not let the water run while washing hands, brushing teeth or shaving. Clean your dishes in the dishwasher—doing them by hand uses more water than necessary. There's no need to pre-rinse your dishes in the sink. Let your dishwasher do the work.

It's Getting Hot in Here Heating and cooling accounts for about 44% of your home's energy bill. In the winter, for each degree you set your thermostat below 73°F, you will save 2 to 4% in heating costs. Set the temperature between 65° and 68°F during the day. Use extra blankets at night to keep warm. In the summer, for every degree you raise your thermostat above 72°F, you will save approximately 5 to 7% on cooling expenses. Use fans whenever possible in the summer months. Fans cost less to use than your air conditioner. Dress appropriately according to the weather.

What Time is it? Utility companies like BGE offer time-of-use rates. From June through September, the off-peak rates for BGE are in effect between 11:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. From October through May, the off-peak rates are in effect between 9:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. Take advantage of these rates and shift your high-energy tasks to off-peak hours. Run your dishwasher and wash your clothes at night when the cheapest rates kick in. Check to see if your utility provider offers off-peak rates.

Low-Cost Ways to Save Energy

Turn the Lights Down Low Of course, you should always shut off all lights when not needed and not in use. If you can't turn them off, consider using dimmers and timers for your indoor and outdoor lighting. Switch your incandescent bulbs to compact fluorescent bulbs—they give off as much light as regular bulbs, but use up to 75% less energy and last 10 times longer—saving you money in the long run.

Checking 1-2-3 Check your furnace and air conditioner filters each month and replace them as needed. Filthy filters block air flow through your heating and cooling systems, increasing your energy bill and also shortening your equipment's life. A clogged filter uses 5% more energy than an unclogged one.

Get with the Program! For a low price, installing a programmable thermostat could save as much as 10% a year on your heating and cooling bills. Once installed and programmed, the thermostat does the work for you by adjusting the temperature at different times of the day, like when you're not at home, or at night when you're asleep.

Out with the Old, In with the New When replacing your appliances (even the minor ones), look for energy-efficient models. The best way to find energy-efficient appliances is by looking for the ENERGY STAR® label, a stamp of approval given by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy. Appliances marked with the ENERGY STAR® label can be as much as 75% more energy-efficient than other appliances and can also save you up to 30% on your energy bills. To get a list of Energy Star qualified appliances go to the website at www.energystar.gov/products or call the toll-free Energy Star Hotline at 1-888-882-7937.

Volunteer Opportunities and Internships

Do you like to help people? Do you live in the Baltimore area? Then come volunteer in the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division.

Our volunteers responds to consumer inquiries on the telephone hotline, and mediate consumer complaints against businesses and health care providers. You will receive training in mediation and learn valuable skills. The division also offers college and law students a variety of internship opportunities.

Our downtown office is convenient to the Light Rail and Metro, and volunteers receive a travel stipend. No experience necessary. Interested? Call 410-576-6519.

Attorney General's Consumer Offices

Consumer Protection Division
200 St. Paul Place, 16th Fl.
Baltimore, MD 21202-2021

- General Consumer Complaints: 410-528-8662
Toll-free: 1-888-743-0023
TDD: 410-576-6372
9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday-Friday
- Medical Billing Complaints: 410-528-1840
9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday
To appeal health plan claims decisions:
Toll-free within Maryland 1-877-261-8807

Branch Offices

- Cumberland
301-722-2000
9 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. 3rd Tuesdays
- Frederick
301-600-1071
9 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. 2nd and 4th Thursdays
- Hagerstown
301-791-4780
8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday
- Salisbury
410-713-3620
8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday
- Southern Maryland (Hughesville)
301-274-4620
Toll-free 1-866-366-8343
9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Tuesdays

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