

Saving energy not as difficult as you think

(ARA) - While saving energy and lowering your bills during the winter takes some personal sacrifice, it might not be as hard as you think. With a combination of changing your habits and a few simple fixes, it's possible to realize significant savings on your utility bills.

You could be well on your way to saving money and lessening your impact on the environment this winter by making a few simple changes:

* Reduce your home's average temperature by a degree or two. You obviously don't want to make your house too chilly for you or your guests, but this is a case where a little can go a long way. For each degree, you may be able to save 1 percent on your heating bill, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. Over the whole winter, that 1 or 2 percent can amount to quite a bit in actual savings.

* Consider a programmable thermostat. This allows you to set the heat at a lower temperature while you are at work or while you sleep, and then program the thermostat to reach comfortable levels before you arrive home in the evening or get up in the morning. Products like the Schlage LiNK remote home-management system, which can be used with a Trane Remote Energy Management Thermostat, allow you the

option of controlling the temperature of your home from most Web-enabled cell phones or a computer no matter where you are. You can also set up the system so when you enter your code in the Schlage wireless keypad lock in your front door, the thermostat will adjust to a temperature that's most comfortable for you. You can even program the thermostat to send text or email alerts if the temperature goes below a preset level, indicating a potential heating system failure. With a system like this, you can save a lot of energy - and money - and always be comfortable when you arrive home.

* Check your HVAC filters and replace them if they are dirty. This should be done at least once a month during times of heavy usage, according to the Department of Energy. Clearing and cleaning any vents in your heating system will also help it run more efficiently. The

Schlage LiNK remote home-management system, when used in conjunction with the Trane thermostat mentioned above, will send text alerts when filters need to be replaced.

* Seal places where heat could escape. Some strategic caulking and weather stripping can go a long way toward bringing your heating costs way down; the Department of Energy says properly sealing your home can reduce costs by 20 percent. Using duct sealant to close up any exposed heating or cooling ducts can also offer significant savings.

* Keep curtains open during the day to let in natural heat energy. Keep them closed at night to provide extra insulation around your windows.

If you're looking for more ideas on how to save energy, it may be a good idea to have a local contractor conduct an energy audit on your home or



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visit www.energystar.gov for more information. The auditor will be able to give you minor tips, as well as suggestions for major projects you may want to do in the future. After all, with a few simple cost-saving measures in place, you

might be able to afford

projects in years to come.

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