Energy Savers

Turn off utility bill blues this winter.

January 1, 2009 By Kat Noel

The weather outside may be frightful, but that doesn't mean your utility bills can't be delightful. Mindy Spatt, The Utility Reform Network's (TURN) media advocacy director, offers advice that's good for your bank account and the environment.

TURN DOWN THE THERMOSTAT. "For every degree you lower your thermostat, you save about 2 percent off your heating bill," Spatt says. "Most people aren't going to notice the difference of lowering it one or two degrees." Also, try solar heating your home by leaving the shades up—this will warm your home the natural way. Plus, sunshine's free!

UNPLUG "ENERGY VAMPIRES" such as your microwave, stereo, TV and DVD player when they aren't in use. Hooking up electronic devices to a power strip with an on/off switch can lower their electricity use by 60 to 80 percent. Gadgets such as your cell phone, iPod and battery charger draw electricity whenever they're connected to an outlet—even if they aren't charging.

GIVE YOUR WINDOWS AND DOORS SOME SPECIAL ATTENTION. Feel around the edges of your windows and doors; is there a cool breeze? Cold drafts can prompt you to turn up the heat, which can end up costing you more money. Fix the problem by inserting caulk in the creases, applying weather strips or putting up window film and leaving it up year-round. Spatt says these techniques can keep the temperature cool in the warmer months and reduce heat loss in the winter. Caulk, weather strips and window film are inexpensive and can be purchased at your local hardware store.

FIX THAT LEAKY FAUCET because the constant dripping is more than annoying—it's costly. One drop per second can waste up to 2,700 gallons per year, which can seriously add up on your bill. Plus, it's bad for the environment. Simply replace your old washer with a new one— that usually solves the problem. Oh, and it costs about 50 cents! If that doesn't work, invest in a plumber—it could save you some serious dough in the long run.

REPLACE THOSE INCANDESCENT LIGHT BULBS with compact fluorescent bulbs (CFLs), which last 10 times longer and use 75 percent less energy. "If you replace your five most frequently used light bulbs with CFLs, you can save about $75 a year and avoid over 500 pounds of carbon emissions," Spatt says. Save more by replacing more bulbs. CFLs cost about $2 each and can be

found at major retailers such as Wal-Mart and Target.

For more tips, visit eere.energy.gov.

DID YOU KNOW?

Putting off vacuuming until the end of the day could put more cash back into your pockets. Some utility companies charge less for electricity used during off-peak hours—for example, extended discounts are given to customers who use it at night. Call your provider to find out if and when it offers this policy.

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