

Managing Winter Energy Bills

The days of cheap energy are gone. You can pay more money. Or you can work smart so you use less energy. Smart work means more money in your pocket for other things you want or need..

Start with believing in yourself. You are not a helpless prisoner of giant energy corporations. You can take control and do things so that you **spend LESS money** on energy. But you have to get busy and do these things; they don't just happen by magical wishing. *Remember – procrastination is the thief of time.*

Get used to not being as toasty warm in the winter as you'd like. Dial down that thermostat more, unplug the heater more. You live in a house, not a sauna! **Bundle up your body!** Dress for the season indoors. Wear several loose layers of clothes. Clean clothes keep you warm better than dirty clothes. Don't forget a hat, even indoors & in bed! Put blankets and quilts on sofas and chairs, so people can bundle up while they are sitting. When you go outside, beware of wind and wet. Keep dry. Wet clothing loses its ability to insulate, and can suck heat right out of you. Stay out of the wind as much as possible. If the floors are bare, put down area rugs.

Heat less of your house. Organize the house so you live in fewer rooms. Heat only the area occupied by people, when the people are there. It is easier to keep a room warm when several people are inside it, than when there is only one. Remember this especially if your heat is cut off during the winter. Food helps keep you warm.

Fill your house with more people, or move in with someone else. The good times are gone. The situation is going from bad to worse. The sooner we adapt, the easier it will be. Larger households are better able to get by in these tough times. More people in the house generally means more income, and that helps.

Your local utility, government, or a charity may have a free weatherization program. Search for information and if there's a waiting line for help with things like insulation, plastic for windows, caulk, repairs, etc., get in that line for your turn.

Stopping drafts is the MOST IMPORTANT THING you can do to reduce your winter heating bill.

Heat always moves to cold. A draft is a place where heat leaks out of your house real fast, giving the illusion of a cold wind coming in. **Use a stick of burning incense to find the drafts in your home.** Do this is on a windy day. Look around doors, windows, light switches, places where pipes enter your house, electrical sockets, cracks in walls. Hold the smoke close to the window seam or the electrical outlet, or wherever you want to check, and see if the smoke rises slowly or is blown one way or the other. If its being blown around, you have a leak. **Stop that leak,** or your heat will leak out of your house and you will end up cold. Caulk is cheap. Use caulk to close up seams and cracks where wind is coming through. If there are larger openings, fill them with newspaper and plastic, a board, some dry wall, or use cans of spray foam to plug the cracks.

If your windows are drafty, put plastic over them. You can use a staple gun to attach the plastic to the window frame, but it is best if you also put narrow strips of wood around the window to hold the plastic securely in place. If your windows are really drafty, do this on the inside too.

Take Advantage of Free Heat From the Sun

When the sun shines through your windows, open up their curtains or blinds and let the sun shine in and fill your house with warmth. Fill empty two-liter bottles with water, put some food coloring in the water so they look dark (mixing several colors like red, blue, and orange usually turns the water dark). Put them in the sun so they soak up the heat, they will then radiate that heat later and help you stay warm. More solar water bottles are better than less – you can also put them outside in the sun and then bring them in when they are hot. If you don't have food coloring, paint the outside of the bottles black. Increase the heat coming through the window by placing a piece of cardboard covered with aluminum foil on one side outside to reflect light into the window. Or duct-tape some of those reflective auto sun shades together and use them to reflect light inside the window. This reflector should start at the bottom edge of the window, so for most houses it won't actually be on the ground. You need to brace it with something or lay it on something and duct-tape it so it won't blow away.

When the sun is not shining through your windows, hang layers of blankets, quilts and curtains over them. You can duct tape reflective auto sunshades together so they are the size of your windows, and sandwich them between blankets to help you keep your warmth inside and the cold outside. You can also hang layers of sheets, quilts, and blankets on walls to insulate the room. Walls can also be insulated with bookcases or stacks of newspapers. For walls and windows, several layers are better than one or two. Go the extra mile in covering up your windows, you'll be glad you did.

At Night. . . Turn the thermostat down or the heater off and pile on the blankets. Dress warmly for bed in sweat pants and shirt, socks, and maybe even a cap (depending on how cold it will get and how low you set the thermostat). **Make a Canopy Bed!** Put a frame over a bed and hang sheets and quilts over the top and the sides to make an old-fashioned canopy bed. Or pitch a tent over your bed or a couch. This creates a smaller space and protects you from cold drafts in the night so you can stay warmer.

Don't pour heat down the drain! When you take a shower, put the stopper in the tub. Let the water cool before draining. Air dry freshly-washed clothes inside the house. Don't pour hot cooking water down the drain, let it cool first. This adds humidity & heat to the inside of your house that would otherwise go down the drain.

Floors. If you have bare floors, put down area rugs. You can layer these for even more insulating effect. Area rugs can also be placed on top of carpet to increase the insulating effect.

Food helps you keep warm. Eat good meals with lots of carbohydrates for fuel. Winter is a great time for warming and nourishing soups and casseroles. Drink plenty of fluids.

Hot Water. Use less of it by installing low-flow shower heads and faucet aerators. This can cut your hot water requirements as much as 50%, saving 14,000 gallons of hot water/year/family of 4. Low flow showerheads go for as little as \$10 at a home supply store and they are easy to install yourself. Insulate the hot water pipes. Insulate the hot water tank with a special "jacket" made for the purpose (typically \$10-20 at home supply stores), or wrap it with insulating materials. Do not cover the top or the bottom, the thermostat or the burner compartment of the tank. Lower the temperature on the water heater to 120 degrees or less. Take quick showers, not baths. **To make a simple solar water heater:** get a 5 gallon plastic bucket with a tight fitting lid, and paint it black. Fill with water, put the lid on tight, and set it in the sunlight for a few hours. Voila, easy and free five gallons of hot water. Use as hot water, or let it slowly cool inside your house and add to the warmth inside.

Lights. Your grandfather was right: **Turn off the lights when you're not using them.** Compact fluorescent bulbs work in regular light fixtures, last longer and use much less energy. They cost more, but they use 75% less energy than regular bulbs & last for 1000s of hours. Use less electrical lighting during the day when natural light is available. Use more "task lighting" -- smaller lights focused on what you are doing.

Washing Clothes. Wash clothes in cold water. Wait until you have a full load, don't do small loads. Instead of using the dryer, air dry your clothes outside on a line. Get some racks to use for indoor clothes drying when its raining or too cold outside, or put clothing on hangers to dry.

Dishwasher. The best thing to do with your dishwasher is disconnect it and sell it to somebody else. Washing dishes by hand should be a family affair -- when many hands pitch in, the work is less tedious and gets done faster. At minimum, don't use the heat dry cycle.

Small batteries. Avoid spending money for small batteries. For \$30 or less, you can get a solar powered battery charger and some rechargeable batteries, and go solar. Or you could use a charger that runs on household current. Small batteries are expensive -- the fewer you have to buy, the more money you have for other things. A good source for inexpensive (about \$15) solar-powered small battery chargers is <http://www.ccrane.com/more-categories/batteries-chargers/solar-powered-battery-charger.aspx> .

Gadgets and Ghost Loads. Many modern appliances and gadgets have "ghost loads" -- they use power all the time, even when you think they're "off". When an appliance isn't in use, make sure it is turned completely off, unplug it if necessary -- especially the television (which consumes lots of energy). Instead of wasting power, plug them into an extension cord or power strip that has an on-off switch. Use the switch to turn it off and on, and you will avoid wasting power via the "ghost loads" in the appliance. Be wary of bringing more electrical gadgets into your house and scrutinize what you already have. Do you really need all that stuff? If you have a water bed, drain it and replace it with a regular bed (a waterbed heater can use as much electricity as a refrigerator.) While you still have it, insulate it well during the day or it will try to heat your whole house. Never use the television for "background noise" while you're doing something else; a radio consumes less power.

Computers. Don't leave your computer equipment on 24/7. It is a myth that turning computers on and off is hard on your computer.

Work with your friends and neighbors to increase your safety, quality of life, and happiness. It's easier to put plastic on your windows if you do it as a group. Get together with friends and family and do everyone's windows. Go on a crusade against leaks. Win the war against hard times, be happy and content. If we want more beauty and wisdom and justice and love, the place to start is to live beauty, wisdom, justice, and love in our own hearts and households.

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