



NO- AND LOW-COST ENERGY-EFFICIENCY TIPS FOR RENTERS



If you are a renter, you may be interested in efficiency improvements that could save you money on your energy bill. However, you probably don't want to spend a lot of money on upgrades or equipment for a residence you do not own. Fortunately, there are many low- and no-cost energy-efficiency improvements that are easy to implement and that can lead to lower utility bills right away.

NO-COST IMPROVEMENTS

There are a number of no-cost improvements you can do that can have a real, immediate effect on your energy bills.

Turn off the lights: This is probably the simplest and most effective way to save money. According to Energy Star, a joint program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Department of Energy, you can save about \$15 per year by turning off just one 60-watt incandescent bulb that would burn 8 hours a day otherwise. So if you turn off ten 60-watt bulbs that would otherwise be on 8 hours a day, you can save about \$150 per year.

Prevent waste in water use and water heating: Ask the landlord to fix leaky faucets, showerheads, pipes, and toilets. Lower the thermostat on your water heater to 120° Fahrenheit (F) and minimize hot shower time. According to Energy Star, a 10-minute shower uses less water than a full bath. Wash only full loads of clothes and dishes. Scrape food off dishes instead of pre-rinsing them—most dishwashers can clean scraped dishes thoroughly, and rinsing dishes wastes a lot of water and energy. Use cold water for laundering.

Avoid overdrying clothes: Clean out the lint trap before drying clothes, and dry only full loads. If your dryer has a moisture-sensing function, use it to avoid overdrying clothes.

Set power-management features of your computer: Free power-management features are built into your computer's operating system, accessible through the "power options" icon in the control panel for Microsoft Windows, or through the "energy saver" (light bulb icon) under system preferences on a Mac. Power-management options are available for a desktop computer or a laptop that is plugged in or running on a battery. At a minimum, computers should be set to go into sleep mode when idle for more than 15 or 20 minutes and turned off when you know you will be away from your desk for an hour or more.

Clean refrigerator coils and check the gaskets. Vacuum dust from the vent beneath the door and from the coils behind the fridge every two months or so, or more often if you have pets. Check for leaks around the refrigerator door. If there are gaps, ask the landlord to repair the gasket or install a new one.

Control plug loads. Unplug small appliances like cell phone and iPod chargers when not in use. Other "plug-load" devices such as microwaves, stereos, televisions, computers, printers, and video game consoles can draw power through the electric cord even when the appliance is turned off. A no-cost solution is to simply unplug these appliances when you've finished using them.

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Energy-Saving Tips



LOW-COST IMPROVEMENTS

If you're able to make a small investment in some energy efficient technologies and improvements, you'll make an even greater dent in your home energy bills. It pays to check if your utility offers rebates on any of the recommended equipment, which can make your out-of-pocket costs even lower. In some cases, you may want to ask your landlord to make these improvements.



Replace incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs): CFLs use about one-third as much energy as conventional incandescent bulbs to deliver the same amount of light, and they last up to 10 times as long, so they reduce costs substantially. Contact your local utility for details on lighting product rebates and giveaway programs.

Remember that CFLs should be recycled; Home Depot and IKEA stores accept them for recycling at no cost. You can also check www.lamprecycle.org or www.earth911.org for local recycling center information.

Install a programmable thermostat: Programmable thermostats set the heating or cooling to minimum levels when the residence or room is unoccupied. In winter, such a setting typically reduces energy use by 2 percent for every degree you reduce, assuming an average outside temperature of 40°F. Thus, reducing from 74°F to 68°F can cut heating costs by over 10 percent. Ask your landlord to buy one, or think about purchasing one yourself—it's a good investment that can pay for itself through energy bill savings in less than a year.

In winter, program your thermostat to be as cool as possible while you sleep, to automatically heat your home before you wake up, and then to cool back down about a half-hour before you leave for the day. But be aware that uninsulated water pipes can freeze in certain situations if the temperature is set back to 50°F or lower. Your utility can help you choose appropriate setback temperatures based on local climate and building data.

In the summer, set the air conditioner to be off during the day (or set to a high temperature such as 85°F), but program it to kick on about a half hour before you typically arrive home.

Use power strips: As mentioned earlier, plug loads such as microwaves, computers, and other electronics can draw power through the electric cord even when turned off. If unplugging numerous individual components is too bothersome or difficult to remember, one option is to plug them into a power strip and turn it off when you're done using the appliances. Another option is to use "smart" power strips that automatically turn off plug loads when they're not in use.

Seal gaps: On a breezy or cold day, walk around the house and feel for drafts around windows and doors. Use caulk and weather stripping to seal gaps around windows, doors, chimneys, and other structural elements.

Tune up your furnace and replace the filter: Ask your landlord to have your furnace tuned up at the beginning of winter and to change the filter twice each heating season.

Install faucet aerators and low-flow showerheads to reduce hot water use. A non-conserving showerhead has a flow rate of 5 to 8 gallons of water per minute, whereas a low-flow showerhead uses 2.5 gallons or less per minute. You'll save 15.2 therms (a measurement of heat energy) per person per year for each gallon per minute that a low-flow showerhead reduces your hot water use.

Cover windows in summer to reduce passive heating: On windows that get direct sunlight, use awnings or window film to block solar heat gain in the summer and reduce the air-conditioning load.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Alliance to Save Energy, "No-Cost Low-Cost Tips for Saving Money & Energy,"
<http://ase.org/content/article/detail/965>

EPA Energy Star Program, "Top 10 Tips for Renters!"
www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=products.es_at_home_tips_renters10

Flex Your Power, "Energy Saving Tips: Free and Low Cost Recommendations,"
www.fypower.org/res/tools/energy_tips.html