

Tips for Saving Energy and Money

for Renters



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Finding ways to reduce energy use in a rented house or apartment may not seem easy. Here are a few simple things that can make a big difference to increase your comfort and reduce your energy bills if you rent. Considering the wide variety of homes and apartments, specific ideas may not apply in every case, but the key is to identify the biggest energy users in your situation and work to reduce those.

Because heating in northern climates is most often the major energy user, concentrate on ways to reduce heating costs first and then look at other strategies for further savings. The items with the green smiley face can make the biggest difference in each category.

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Space Heating and Cooling

Winter

- ☺ Turning down the heat at night and while you are at work can result in significant savings. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, you can realize as much as 1 percent savings off your heating or cooling bill for every degree you set back the thermostat for an eight-hour period.
- ☺ Check attic insulation levels. The recommended level of insulation for attics in most northern climates is at least 16 inches of insulation, depending on the insulation type. If you have less than that, ask your landlord to upgrade it.
- Replace filters regularly in forced-air furnaces. Do not clean and reuse disposable filters.
- Reduce heat to rooms that are not used, and keep doors to those rooms closed.

- Ensure the furnace or boiler is tuned by a qualified heating, ventilating and air conditioning technician each year. Heating appliances that burn a fuel source require regular maintenance to ensure they are operating at peak performance. The inspection also will identify potential hazards such as cracked heat exchangers.
- Space heaters allow you to heat just one room while keeping the rest of the apartment or home cool. Avoid being taken in by outrageous energy saving claims of “miracle” heaters. Affordable, high-quality radiant and convection space heaters are available at most hardware or home improvement stores for a fraction of the hundreds of dollars of heavily advertised heaters and heat just as well.
- **Warning:** You never should use the kitchen stove for home heating. Dangers include burns, carbon monoxide poisoning and fire hazards.



Attic insulation, before and after.

(photos by Carl Pedersen)

Summer

- ☺ Turn down the air conditioning while you are sleeping and away at work, just as you would with the heating system.
- ☺ Open the windows at night and early in the morning to let in cool air. Ventilate the home with fans that draw in the outside air. Then close the windows and blinds during the day to keep the cool air inside.
- Install window-mounted air conditioners in windows that are shaded or face north. Remove and store the air conditioner for the winter months.

Windows and Doors

All of these strategies can make a significant difference:

- ☺ Air leaks may account for dollars a day in lost heating and cooling costs. Depending on how leaky the home or apartment is, request that the landlord install a fresh bead of caulk or new weather stripping around window and door frames.
- ☺ Inexpensive heat-shrink films can be installed over windows to create a pocket of insulating air and reduce air leaks.
- ☺ Add simple things such as window blinds or curtains to reduce energy use. Any window covering can be used to reduce heat loss, but lined fabrics or honeycombed blinds generally are better insulators.
- ☺ Open blinds or curtains on the sunny side of the building to allow the sun

to heat the room for free in the winter and reduce the need for additional lighting. Close the blinds and curtains at night to retain the heat.

- ☺ In the summer, use blinds, curtains or summer shades to block sunlight from unnecessarily adding heat to a home.
- ☺ Window treatments that are fitted to the window will reduce conductive air currents and the drafty feel around windows.

Lighting and Appliances

- ☺ The best way to save money and energy is to not use that energy. Simply turn lights and appliances off when not in use. This is an easy habit for people of all ages.
- ☺ Installing energy-efficient light bulbs for lights that are used frequently can reduce energy used for lighting significantly. Those spiral light bulbs, also known as CFLs, use 75 percent less energy than incandescent bulbs and last much longer.
- Each appliance you purchase has two price tags; the first one is the initial cost, and the second is the cost to operate the appliance. When shopping for new appliances and electronic devices, do not just buy what is on sale. Find out how much energy the appliance uses. As a rule of thumb, purchase items with an ENERGY STAR label.



- Use energy-saving modes on electronic devices. On dishwashers, do not use the dry feature, and ensure computers and video games go into sleep modes if you are not turning them off.
- Even appliances that appear to be off may be using electricity. Unplug appliances when not in use or use a power strip to stop the flow of electricity to appliances that are used infrequently, such as computer printers.
- If you have a washer and dryer, wash only full loads, and consider hanging clothes to dry or partially dry them in the dryer, then hang them to complete drying. This may add humidity to the home in the winter, when humidity is needed.

Water Heating

- ☺ Check the temperature of your hot water heater; if it is above 120 degrees Fahrenheit, you can save money by lowering the temperature. If you are concerned about a big difference at the tap, mark the present setting and turn it down a little at a time until you reach 120 degrees or the minimum temperature you find comfortable.
- ☺ Washing clothes in hot water costs 20 to 40 cents per load. Use cold-water detergents made for cold water. Use hot water only for very dirty clothes and diapers.
- Install a low-flow showerhead.
- Run the dishwasher only when full.

For additional information on energy-related topics, www.ndsu.edu/energy

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