

**“WORKING WITH WISCONSIN FAMILIES”****Lana Anderson, Family Living Educator, 715-232-1636****December 28, 2005****Boosting Energy Efficiency in Your Home**

As we watch energy costs rise for everything from filling up our vehicles to paying our home utility bills, the need for conservation and efficient energy use is critical. “We can conserve and improve efficiency now and buy new more energy efficient appliances or new homes in the future,” says Lana Anderson, University of Wisconsin-Extension Family Living Educator for Dunn County.

Anderson offers the following practical strategies to implement energy conservation and efficiency in the areas of highest energy use in the typical Midwestern home.

Heating and cooling account for well over half (56%) of the energy use that affects comfort and impacts cost significantly in a typical U.S. home. Begin by reviewing how you currently heat your home. Based on 2002 Wisconsin Focus on Energy information, as many as one third of Wisconsin homes are poorly insulated. However, insulation can pay for itself in as little as two years. Managing your home heating to maximize efficiency is an important step.

Here are a few no- or low-cost tips:

- Lowering the thermostat from 72 to 65 degrees can save up to 10 percent on your heating bill. Heating costs can be decreased over time with even a one to two degree decrease. Lowering the thermostat to as low as 60 degrees F during sleeping hours may be an acceptable temperature for some individuals and families.
- Keep furniture, draperies and curtains away from air registers or radiators and don't block cold air returns.
- Keep baseboards and registers clean and free of dust.
- Remove room air conditioners from windows during the winter months.
- Close off unneeded rooms.

Thermostats provide direct control over your heating system, allowing you to regulate the amount of heat to match your family's needs. There are two basic types of thermostats, standard and programmable. A programmable thermostat conveniently raises and lowers your temperature settings automatically based on settings you determine. If used correctly, a programmable thermostat will pay for itself in about two

years. You can get the same benefit with a standard thermostat if you are willing to regularly change the temperature setting as the need for heat changes throughout the day and night. The life expectancy of an average home heating system is approximately 17 to 20 years.

Heating water is the second largest energy user in a typical Midwestern home. Setting your water heater at 120 F. instead of 140 F. can save energy dollars monthly and increase the life expectancy of the hot water heater, which is approximately ten years. Unless your water heater has an R-value of at least R-24, insulating a conventional water heater can reduce standby heat losses by 25 to 45 percent, resulting in a savings of approximately four to nine percent. In case you don't know the R-value of your water heater, one that is warm to the touch needs additional insulation. A pre-cut insulating jacket or blanket is available for between \$10-20 and pays for itself in one year. Choose one with an insulating value of at least R-8.

Using warm or cold water for home laundry can significantly impact the cost of heating water. Hot water heaters wear out suddenly, leaving consumers little if any time to comparison shop. There is a trade-off between cost and energy efficiency. The most efficient heaters will cost more, but the savings over time may be worth the initial cost. Turning off the conventional water heater when away from home for a few days is also an energy saving strategy.

If you live in a typical U.S. home, your appliances and home electronics are responsible for about 20 percent of your energy bills. These appliances include all large and small home appliances, computers, electronic devices and entertainment systems. In some homes, several of the same appliances are found in various rooms. Avoid having the same television channel on in different rooms and turn off computers when not in use. They still use small amounts of electricity while turned on.

Tips for low or no-cost appliances include:

- Regularly clean the condenser coils under or behind a refrigerator or freezer. Unplug the appliance before cleaning.
- Decide what you need before opening refrigerator or freezer doors and close quickly.
- Place refrigerators and freezers away from direct sunlight and heat sources.
- Wash only full loads of laundry and dishes.
- Clean the lint filter on your clothes dryer after each load and often during the drying of high lint items such as rugs or blankets.

Air leaks in the home may occur under doors, where different materials such as brick and siding meet, between the foundation and walls, and between the chimney and the siding. Also inspect the following areas for any cracks or gaps that may cause air leaks: door and window frames, outdoor water faucets, vents and fans, air conditioners, where dryer vents pass through walls, electrical and gas service entrances, and cable TV and telephone lines. Consider adding insulation at the bottom of outside doors, behind electrical outlet plates, around windows and other possible air leak areas.

For more information on home energy savings, visit the following web sites:

U.S. Department of Energy - [http://www.eere.energy.gov/consumer/your\\_home](http://www.eere.energy.gov/consumer/your_home),

Wisconsin Public Service Corporation - <http://www.wisconsinpublicservice.com/home/saving.asp>,

Energy Star - [www.energystar.gov](http://www.energystar.gov) .

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