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Modify your home to lower energy bills

Every time I go to the gas station to fill up, I'm reminded of how gas hovering around \$4 per gallon is eating into everyone's budget. That's why you see more and more people buying fuel-efficient vehicles and driving less. But high oil prices aren't the only rising energy costs that consumers face these days.

Our home energy costs are also skyrocketing, hitting historic highs with no sign of them decreasing anytime soon. That's why it is more important than ever to find ways to cut down on your energy bills. Fortunately, there are a lot of ways you can reduce your home-energy bills by following some money-saving tips.

* **Add the proper insulation.** Upgrading the insulation in your attic to at least an R-38 or as high as an R-49 level is one of the most cost-effective things you can do to make your home energy efficient. If your budget is squeaky tight, ceiling insulation is most important. Remember, heat rises.

* **Install a programmable thermostat.** We have all forgotten to turn down the heat or turn up the air conditioning before we go to bed or leave for work.

A programmable thermostat can raise and lower the temperature at pre-set times throughout the day, saving you money the moment you install it. In fact, you can actually make up the cost of the thermostat in about a year.

* **Turn down the temperature on your water heater.** This simple tip can not only save you money, it can decrease your potential for being scalded with hot water when taking a shower or even washing your hands.

* **Wash clothes in cold water.** Many of today's detergents do a great job of cleaning your clothes in cold water, and can even get out those grass and dirt stains.

* **Seal leaky windows and doors.** One of the cheapest ways to improve your heating and cooling efficiency is to seal leaks around your home's doors and windows. Use a high-end silicone or adhesive caulk.

* **Use compact fluorescent light bulbs.** These bulbs are all the rage now and use one-third the electricity versus incandescent bulbs, yet last up to 13 times longer and produce less heat. Look for K6500. Its light is bright white.

* **Add roof ventilation.** Attics require soffit venting and ridge or pot vents.

Cooling air comes in the soffit vents, goes up the roof deck boards and out through the ridge vents.

If an attic has too little ventilation, the attic absorbs and stores the sun's heat during summer and winter. Summer attic temperatures easily go up to 140 degrees. This heats the roof deck, "cooks" the shingles from underneath and places a huge burden on the home's cooling system.

* **Add ceiling fans in every room.** Ceiling fans are a great way to help you make a home more comfortable and use less energy. During the summer, ceiling fans move the air to improve the air-flow, and in the winter a fan set at slow speed can push warm air away from the ceiling and spread the heat evenly in a room. Ceiling fans are also attractive and can improve your decor.

* **Add a central or room humidifier, even if you don't have duct work.**

General Aire (866) 476-5101, www.generalaire.com, makes a whole house unit. For portable use, choose a warm mist ultrasonic humidifier.

These are just a few energy tips you can try around the home to help save on energy costs. For more information and energy-saving tips, you should surf over to the Energy Star Web site at www.energystar.com. Energy Star is a joint program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy, whose mission is to help us all save money and protect the environment through energy-efficient products and practices.

The Web site offers you a chance to compare your home's energy efficiency against other homes around the country and get recommendations for energy-saving home improvements by filling out the Energy Star Home Energy Yardstick form online. The site also offers information on Energy Star certified new homes, and a listing of Energy Star certified products in more than 50 categories that use less energy, save money and help protect the environment.

In addition, the site also offers many other tips on energy conservation around the home, such as the Guide to Energy Efficient Heating and Cooling.

And the great thing about using these energy-saving tips and buying Energy Star labeled products is that you are not only saving on energy costs, but you are helping save the environment.

Lastly, you might want to consider getting a professional to do an energy inspection of your home to determine areas that may need improvement.

Companies like Property Facts Home Inspection in Plymouth, (734) 207-9004, www.propertyfactsinspections.com, are now doing energy audits in addition to home inspections. To find additional certified home inspectors that do energy audits in the area, you can contact the National Association of Home Inspectors, (800) 448-3942, www.nahi.org.

You can also call a company like Infrared Services of Michigan, (810) 329-9033, www.ismichigan.com, to schedule a blower door test and infrared scanning to identify thermal leaks.

While you can't control the cost of electricity or natural gas, you can make your home more "fuel efficient" by learning all you can, making some adjustments in your home energy lifestyle and using some elbow grease for some of these simple home energy improvements.

If you have a question, call the "Handyman Show" with Glenn Haege at (866) ASK GLENN from noon-2 p.m. Saturday or Sunday. The show can be heard on WJR and more than 160 radio stations nationwide. To suggest a question for Haege's Wednesday "Ask Glenn" column, e-mail askglenn @masterhandyman .com.