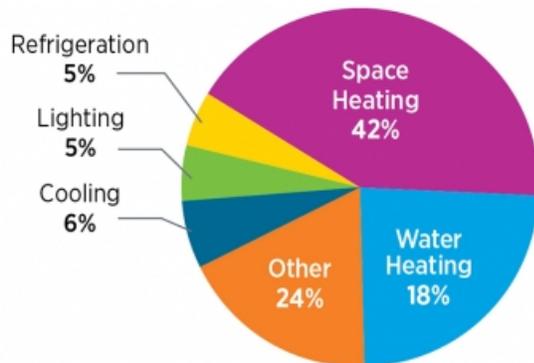


Daily Union – Saturday, October 4, 2014

Although this is only the first week of fall, our Kansas weather will promise us cold temperatures and snow before the first day of winter, which begins December 21. Ready or not, it's time to think about how you can prepare your home and budget for cool weather.



Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration

Did you know that heating your home is by far one of the largest energy expenses for a family? The average low-income family spends about \$482 a year on heating. There are things you can do to help curb these expenses throughout cool autumn and cold winter months.

- 1) Turn your thermostat down five degrees. On the average, every degree you reduce your thermostat setting saves you 2% in your monthly bill. If you reduce the setting five degrees, you would save about \$48 on that average \$482 annual expense. It costs nothing to put on a pair of warm slippers, sweatshirt or hoodie to wear around the house.
- 2) Get your home's heating system checked by a professional. Ensuring that your thermostat is reading the temperature accurately, and that your filter system is performing at its best, are two of the many factors that are looked at with this type of inspection.
- 3) Clean the filter on a forced air heat system every month. The system has to work harder if the filter is caked with lint and dirt. It takes more energy when it has to work harder.
- 4) Check the water levels on hot water or steam heat systems. A professional in heating and air conditioning can tell you how to add more water and give you tips on how to make your system work better.
- 5) Keep the area around your furnace clutter free. This not only improves the airflow into the furnace, it also reduces the risk of fire in your home.

- 6) Keep the registers clear so that heat can get into each room. Make sure there aren't any drapes, furniture or other items blocking the registers or return air vents.
- 7) Use drapes and window coverings to help contribute to the temperature in your home. Windows that face the afternoon sun should have the drapes and/or shades open during the day and closed during the night. This will help the house seem more comfortable as well as reduce the chill from cold windows.
- 8) Check the doors in your home. If you have a storm door, make sure it is securely in place. Seal leaks by caulking or using weather stripping. Replace door bottoms and thresholds with ones that have pliable sealing gaskets. If you live in drafty home, you may need to put a draft guard around doors to help reduce the cold draft that comes in under the door. These can be purchased at discount stores or made from leftover fabric sewn together and filled with rice or dry beans. In my house, with 3 young boys, I have several pairs of old jeans that will be used for this purpose. Cutting one of the "good" legs off the jeans, I will sew one end shut, fill the leg with dry beans, and sew the other end shut. If you don't have a sewing machine, secure the ends with heavy rubber bands or tie with a heavy cord.
- 9) If you have storm windows, make sure they are in place once winter begins. Check your windows to make sure they are free of cracks. Loose windows can be winterized with foam weather stripping. These efforts will help keep the cold air from coming in the house.
- 10) Using an automatic thermostat will also help you better manage your heating costs. Keep the house at a lower temperature while you are away from home and while you are sleeping. Putting more covers on the bed and reducing the night temperature can cut heating costs.

You can be even more proactive in your energy saving efforts when you purchase a heating system. In addition to considering the style, performance, and availability, you need to consider the cost of operation for the system. You want to make sure you are getting the best system for both your needs and your budget. Look for the Energy Star logo. Systems that have the Energy Star label have met rigorous standards for design, construction, performance, and energy efficiency.



Appliances, heating, and cooling systems earning the Energy Star rating use less energy and meet energy efficiency guidelines set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Energy. Heating systems essentially come with two price tags – the cost to purchase the system from the company or store and the cost to

operate the system which can be found on the yellow Energy Guide that accompanies the Energy Star label. Image Source: www.energystar.org

Another area where winter bills are impacted is through our water heater. People tend to take longer and hotter showers in the winter months. The water heater is the second biggest energy user in homes. You are charged for both the heater itself and the water it heats. An average family can spend \$290 a year just taking showers. Limiting the amount of time in the shower, installing a low-flow showerhead, and turning the water heater thermostat down to 120°F are all actions that you can take to help reduce the financial impact associated to this energy expense. If you need to purchase a new water heater for your home, make sure you get one that is no larger than what your household needs. Again, look for the Energy Star logo on the water heater to ensure you are getting a high quality, energy efficient product.

Until next time, keep living resourcefully!