



Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

Your Residential Utility Consumer Advocate

CONSUMERS' FACT SHEET

Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

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HOLIDAY

SMART ENERGY LIVING

Saving Money During the Holidays

Interested in saving money this holiday season? Try to cut the costs of holiday lighting. The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) has put together some energy-saving tips so that you can spend less on utility bills and more on gift-giving this year.

Home Energy Use

Heating, cooling, lighting, and major appliances account for almost all the energy used in an average household. The holidays can inflate your bill due to increased heating costs, increased appliance usage, and additional lighting around your home.

Increasing Energy Efficiency

You can reduce energy usage in your home and save money by changing how you use your appliances.

Refrigerator

For refrigerators, consider cleaning the coils so that the compressor doesn't have to work as hard. Additionally, minimize opening the door to keep cold air in. If you currently own two refrigerators, consider eliminating one. If after these changes, your costs on refrigeration are still too high, then you may want to consider purchasing a newer model. Modern refrigerators can be up to 75 percent more efficient than those produced in the 1980s.

Water Heater

To decrease the energy used by your water heater, try turning down the temperature to 120°F. Higher temperatures cause excess heat loss from the tank, and lower temperatures

could cause bacteria build-up. Beware that if you have an older dishwasher, you may have to keep your water heater at 140°F for the dishwasher to run properly. Newer dishwasher models have built in water boosters which allow the dishwasher to increase the temperature of the water. To determine whether or not your dishwasher has this feature, refer to your owner's manual.

You can also save energy by making sure that your water heater is working efficiently. Using an insulator blanket to wrap around water tanks over 10 years old and covering pipes with foam sleeves can prevent heat from being lost. When using insulator blankets make sure not to cover any doors, vents, or relief valves; additionally, do not use an insulator blanket on a water tank less than 10 years old. These tanks are already built with proper insulation, so insulating them further could cause them to overheat.

In addition to improving the efficiency of your water heater, there are some simple changes you can make to decrease hot water usage. Repairing leaky faucets and installing energy-efficient showerheads and faucet aerators is a good place to start. Washing only full loads in the dishwasher and laundry machine will also help you conserve hot water.

Heating System

During the winter months, heating your home can be costly. One way to keep your heating costs down is by turning your thermostat back 7°- 10°F when you are away from home. By making this change for 8 hours a day, you can save as much as 10 percent a year on your

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The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC), the residential utility consumer advocate, represents the interests of 4.5 million households in proceedings before state and federal regulators and in the courts.

The state agency also educates consumers about electric, natural gas, telephone and water issues.

For more information, please visit the OCC website at www.occ.ohio.gov.



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heating costs. Beware that you must keep areas around pipes heated to at least 40°F at all times; otherwise, you could risk your pipes bursting.

When you are home, you can also save on heating costs by keeping the thermostat set to an efficient temperature of 68°F during the day, and slightly lower at night. Using layered clothing and heavy blankets can help you stay comfortable despite these lower temperatures.

Humidity can create warmth in your home and allow you to set the thermostat to a lower temperature. Using a humidifier, opening the bathroom door while showering, and decorating with houseplants, which put moisture into the air, can help increase humidity.

Simple actions such as sealing air leaks around doors and weatherizing your windows help reduce heat loss. Heat can also be lost through exhaust fans in the bathroom and kitchen. To avoid this, try minimizing the amount of time these fans are on in your home. Heat can also escape through the chimney; to prevent this make sure that the damper is closed when a fire isn't burning. To improve the efficiency of your heating further, replace furnace air filters every 1-3 months, as noted in the owners' manual, and tune up your HVAC equipment yearly.

Cooking Habits

When cooking for guests, it can be challenging to limit your energy usage. Implementing a few simple changes may help you save energy. One simple change is to use a microwave rather than a standard oven when possible; this can use up to 80 percent less energy. Additionally, try to bake many dishes at once, keep the oven door closed as much as possible, keep your oven burners clean, and cook on the correct size stove burner to allow your appliances to work more efficiently.

Lighting

Consider choosing LED or CFL bulbs instead of incandescent bulbs for your holiday and year-round lighting. LEDs can last for decades, use up to 75 percent less energy than incandescent bulbs, and generate zero heat. CFLs are very affordable and use 70 percent less energy than incandescent bulbs, although they do contain small amounts of mercury. Despite LED bulbs' higher sticker price, they can save you money in the long run due to their superior energy efficiency.

Another way to save electricity during the holiday season is by turning your outdoor lighting off when it is not in use. Purchasing an outdoor timer to automatically turn your holiday lighting on and off could save you both time and money.

When shopping for bulbs, look for lumens (lm) and not watts. Lumens measure the actual brightness of the bulb, whereas watts measure the power a bulb uses. Today, a higher wattage does not always mean a brighter bulb. Making these changes to your holiday lighting can save you a significant amount of money.

Avoiding Vampire Power

Vampire power is the electricity that electronics continue to use when the power is turned off. This can account for 5 to 10 percent of your energy bill. When practical, you should unplug all electronics that have a standby mode. Implementing these changes is especially important when going on vacation, because devices can use a lot of vampire power from sitting in stand-by mode for an extended period of time.

For More Information

To learn more about how you can make simple changes to lower your utility bills, please visit www.occ.ohio.gov.