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EFFICIENCY UPGRADES TO HELP YOU SAVE THIS SUMMER



If your home feels too warm during summer and too chilly during winter, you may need additional insulation.



Smart LED bulbs offer convenient control and help boost energy savings at home.



Sealing air leaks around your home is a simple, effective way to save energy and lower your bills.

by Abby Berry

Spring and summer are opportune times for home upgrades and DIY projects. If you're planning to make improvements to your home, consider upgrades that promote better efficiency.

Here are a few projects that can help you save energy and money as well as increase the comfort of your home.

Installing a smart thermostat is one of the simplest ways to manage home energy use and keep summer bills in check. Smart thermostats are easy to install and allow you to control your heating and cooling system from your phone. You can purchase an ENERGY STAR®-certified smart thermostat for as low as \$100, which can save you 8% on annual heating and cooling costs, about \$50 per year. This upgrade will quickly pay for itself, and you'll gain insight into better ways to heat and cool your home.

Speaking of smart, additional devices like smart LED bulbs also offer convenient control and help boost energy savings at home. With smart lighting, you can set a schedule for when and how your lights should be turned on or off. And the next time you head out to run errands and realize you left the lights on, all you have to do is turn them off through your phone. Smart lights come in a variety of shapes, colors, and brightness levels — and you can purchase bulbs for indoor or outdoor use. Schedule outdoor smart lights to illuminate your home at night and when you're out of town for better security.

While it's not as trendy as incorporating smart technologies, sealing air leaks around your home is a simple, effective way to save energy and lower your bills. Applying new (or replacing old) weather

stripping around doors and windows can instantly make your home more comfortable and reduce energy waste. Applying caulk to fill gaps can also improve the seal of your home. Caulk can be applied to a variety of areas, including windows, doors, bathtubs, and sinks.

If your home feels too warm during summer (and too chilly during winter) even after you've sealed with weather stripping and caulk, your home may need additional insulation. Insulation is considered a more expensive efficiency upgrade; however, if your home is under-insulated, additional insulation can make a big impact on reducing energy use and costs. The cost of new insulation depends on a variety of factors like materials, size of the home, and whether you use a contractor. Typically, the project costs can be recouped in a few years and your home will immediately feel more comfortable.

Of course, there are additional efficiency upgrades that can make a big impact on energy use, like replacing old appliances with ENERGY-STAR® models or replacing old, leaky windows with new, energy efficient windows. But these upgrades can be a bit pricey.

If you're wanting to make your home more energy efficient but you're not sure where to start, your best bet is to enlist the help of an expert to conduct an energy audit of your home. An energy audit can easily identify areas to boost efficiency, and then you can determine the projects you want to tackle first based on your budget and needs.

Abby Berry writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.



Electric Cooperatives of Mississippi's 36th COOPERATIVE LEADERS WORKSHOP

A group of 82 high school juniors from all over the state gathered in Jackson from March 1 to March 3 for the 36th Electric Cooperatives of Mississippi Cooperative Leaders Workshop.

The program instills leadership skills, inspires creative thinking, encourages community service, and introduces students to legislative elected officials from their communities.

The conference was held at The Westin in downtown Jackson.

The students earned the trip to the workshop following a competitive selection process sponsored by their local electric cooperative. They will

travel to Washington, D.C. in June for a six-day youth leadership tour.

Central Electric students Drew Kelly, Kendall Bracewell, Keondrae Anderson, Maggie Taylor, and Sara Kelly spent the three days in Jackson with other students from around the state. They met with their state lawmakers, toured the state capitol, participated in problem solving activities, and attended speeches by motivational speakers who urged them to serve their communities.

Gov. Tate Reeves and Secretary of State Michael Watson spoke to the students during the workshop.

LEARN. GROW. EXPERIENCE.



A. (From left to right) Central Electric Cooperative Youth Leaders students Drew Kelly, Maggie Taylor, Kendall Bracewell, Sara Kelly, and Keondrae Anderson take photos on the first day of the workshop. **B.** More fun photos on the first day of the Cooperative Leaders Workshop. **C.** Rep. Scott Bounds, Sen. Jenifer Branning, and Rep. Kenneth Walker with Central Electric students. **D.** Drew Kelly, Sara Kelly, Kendall Bracewell, Maggie Taylor, and Keondrae Anderson stand in front of the State Capitol.

EASY BEHAVIOR CHANGES To save energy

by Miranda Boutelle

Q

I want to lower my energy use, but I don't know where to start. How can I find out how much energy I use? What are some ways I can save energy without spending a lot of money?

A

You can change your energy use by changing your behavior. When looking at electric bills, many people focus on the total dollar amount of the bill. When trying to manage your energy costs, I suggest changing your focus to energy use. While you don't have control over the cost of the energy, you can control how much energy you use.

SET GOALS

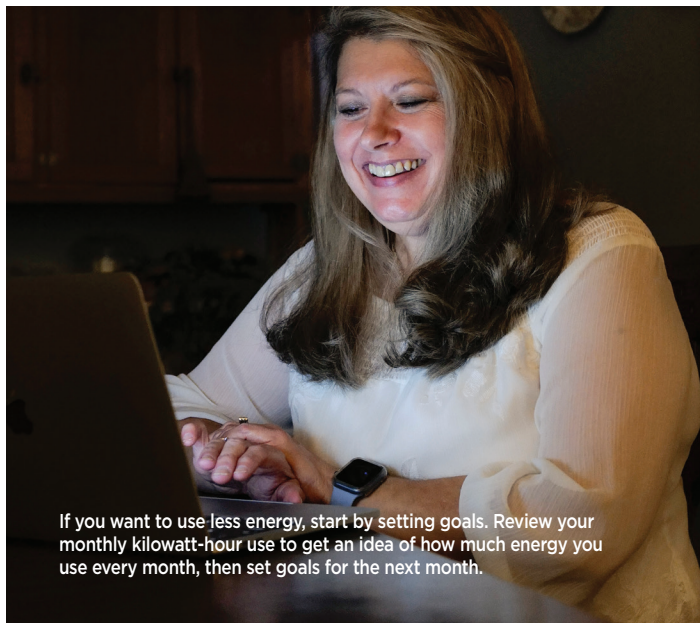
Instead of thinking about your bills in terms of dollars, think about them in terms of kilowatt-hours. A kilowatt-hour is the unit of energy used for most electric bills. Review your monthly kWh use to get an idea of how much you use every month.

Once you've reviewed your energy use, set goals for the next month. Try to use less energy than the month before, and check your results on your next bill.

KNOW WHEN TO USE LESS ENERGY

Some electric utilities offer time-of-use rates, which means electricity costs are dependent on the time of day. This pricing structure more closely reflects the cost to electric utilities and helps consumers understand that energy costs more when the demand for it is higher.

Even if your electric bill does not include time-of-use rates, it can be beneficial to delay energy-intensive chores or tasks when demand is lower. Peak hours are typically in the morning as we prepare for work and in the evening when we get home and start preparing food and turning on entertainment devices. Doing laundry and running the dishwasher are easy activities to delay until after peak hours.



If you want to use less energy, start by setting goals. Review your monthly kilowatt-hour use to get an idea of how much energy you use every month, then set goals for the next month.

POWER "OFF" FOR ENERGY SAVINGS

When looking for energy savings, remember that "off" is the most efficient setting. Turning off lights is a classic strategy, especially if your lighting is incandescent. Consider switching to energy-saving LED lightbulbs.

Computers and gaming systems can waste energy even when in sleep mode. The higher the wattage and the more hours the device is on, the more energy used. Laptops use the least energy, followed by personal computers at about 200 watts. Gaming consoles typically use less energy than gaming PCs. Don't forget to turn off the monitor as well.

You can lower your energy use even more with smart power strips, which cut power to devices that are not in use. Many electronics continue to draw power even when they are turned off. This could add 5% to 10% to your monthly bill, according to the Department of Energy. Installing smart power strips is an easy way to ensure devices are completely turned off and not drawing power.

ADJUST THE TEMP

When it comes to lowering your energy use, the settings on your thermostat are another great place to check. Keep in mind, the weather affects your electric bill for heating and air conditioning.

The closer you can keep the indoor temperature to the outdoor temperature, the more you will save. You want to protect your home from damage in extreme heat and cold, but if you can turn the temperature down a few degrees in winter and up in summer, you will save on energy costs.

Ensuring your filters in your heating and cooling system are clean is an easy way to keep your system maintained and operating efficiently. Adding annual servicing by a professional maximizes the efficiency and can lengthen the life of your system.

Understanding your energy use and making small adjustments to your routine will help you reach your energy use goals.

Miranda Boutelle is the chief operating officer at Efficiency Services Group in Oregon, a cooperatively owned energy efficiency company.