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### Test your energy-saving savvy to save big bucks

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CTW Features  
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Do you know all you think you know about saving energy in your home? Most homeowners have picked up some myths and misperceptions along with the straight dope, as scientists at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory in Berkeley, Calif., discovered.

Visit the Berkeley Lab's Home Energy Saver Web site ([www.homeenergysaver.lbl.gov](http://www.homeenergysaver.lbl.gov)) to take a do-it-yourself energy audit online and identify specific steps you can take to reduce energy consumption in your home. But first, set aside some fuzzy old ideas:



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1. When I turn off an appliance, it's off.

Most devices continue to consume power when they're switched off -- sometimes as much power as when they're on.

2. Cleaning the coils on my refrigerator saves energy.

You may feel better getting rid of the dust bunnies that lurk under your fridge, but the effort won't save much energy. The few studies undertaken to measure this widely held belief have come up empty-handed.

3. Dimming my incandescent lights by 50 percent will cut my lighting bill in half.

The savings will be less than you expect. As the voltage drops, the filament in an incandescent bulb cools, the wavelength spectrum of the light it emits shifts further into the infra-red and the efficiency of the bulb suffers.

4. Turning the thermostat up will make my home get warmer faster.

It's tempting to think of a thermostat like a water tap, so that the wider you open it the more water (or heat, or cool) will come out. Not true. A thermostat works more like a light switch: if it's "on," the same amount of light (or heat, or cool) will come out.

5. Installing foam gaskets in my electrical outlets will significantly reduce air leakage.

It's an easy and satisfying weekend job, and it leaves homeowners feeling a glow of accomplishment. However, measurements show that less than 1% of a home's air leakage is due to outlets.

6. Leaving lights, computers and other appliances on uses less energy than turning them off and makes them last longer.

Turn them off, and sleep soundly. The small surge of power required to turn on some devices is vastly smaller than the energy used to run the device when it's not needed. While it used to be the case that cycling appliances and lighting on and off drastically reduced their useful lifetimes, these problems have been largely overcome through better design.

7. Insulating the ceiling will just cause more heat to leak out of the windows.

Adding insulation to one part of a home won't increase the "pressure" on heat losses through other parts. However, it is certainly true that poorly insulated areas will be the major source of heat loss, and they often merit attention before improving already well-insulated parts of the home.

8. Switching to electric room heaters will reduce my energy bill.

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This is true only under some circumstances. If you have central electric heating, the using room heaters will most likely save you money. But, if you have central gas heating, which is far cheaper per unit of useful heat, you can easily match or even exceed your heating bill by switching to electrical units.

9. Fluorescent lighting is unhealthy.

Fluorescent lighting has changed dramatically in the last few years. Today's fluorescents have greatly improved color quality. The annoying flicker and hum have been eliminated from fluorescents that use electronic ballasts. Because they require less electricity, fluorescents generate less power plant pollution, emissions which have many known health effects. Fluorescent lights also contain small amounts of mercury and should be disposed of properly. However, additional mercury releases are avoided thanks to reduced use of mercury-containing fossil fuels used to generate electricity. If it's been a while since you tried fluorescent lights, you might give them another chance.

10. Halogen lighting is super-efficient.

It's true that halogen lights use slightly less energy than standard incandescent bulbs, but halogens require transformers that can use extra energy, even when the light is off. They are also a fire hazard. By comparison, compact fluorescent lights are nearly three times as efficient and don't pose a fire hazard. Many new models are dimmable, like halogens.

For more on energy-saving lighting strategies and sources, visit [www.lightsite.net](http://www.lightsite.net).

Source: Home Energy Saver Challenge - Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory.

#### Sure-Fire Ways to Cut Energy Use, Cost

Wise up. There are some simple steps to take in order to save energy. Try these tips from Energy Star, the U.S. government-backed program devoted to improving energy efficiency:

- Convert the five most-used lights into your home from old incandescent bulbs to Energy Star qualified light bulbs. The move can save you more than \$60 per year in energy costs.
- Make a quick trip to the hardware store or home improvement center for a hot water insulation kit to wrap your water heater and save on water heating costs.
- Use an Energy Star qualified programmable thermostat that can automatically adjust the temperature of your home when you are away.
- Ensure that your whole system (furnace, heat pump, air conditioner, and heating and cooling) is energy efficient. Leaky ducts can decrease the overall energy efficiency of your heating and cooling system by as much as 20%. Duct sealing increases efficiency and lowers your utility bills.
- Upgrade your refrigerator if it is 10 years old or older. Refrigerators use more energy than any other appliance in your home. An Energy Star qualified refrigerator uses about half the energy of a 10-year-old conventional model.
- Consider replacing your central air-conditioning system if it is more than seven years old. Look for the Energy Star label when you buy and use 20% less energy than a standard model.
- Replace your clothes washer with an Energy Star labeled model when it is time. To save on energy costs, wash your clothes in cooler water. Energy Star qualified washers use 50 percent less water and 70 percent less energy per load; that's up to \$100 every year.

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#### Your Turn

Posted by DAVE on December 22, 2006 at 9:48 a.m. (Suggest removal)

This may be fine, but we're forgetting that everytime one up-grades their ability to curb energy useage, the power companies just raise their prices!! So your back to square one, and nothing is saved!!!

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