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How to save energy at home

Washing your clothes in cold water may save you \$30 to \$40 a year – and you don't have to worry about turning your underwear pink.

By Clint Williams

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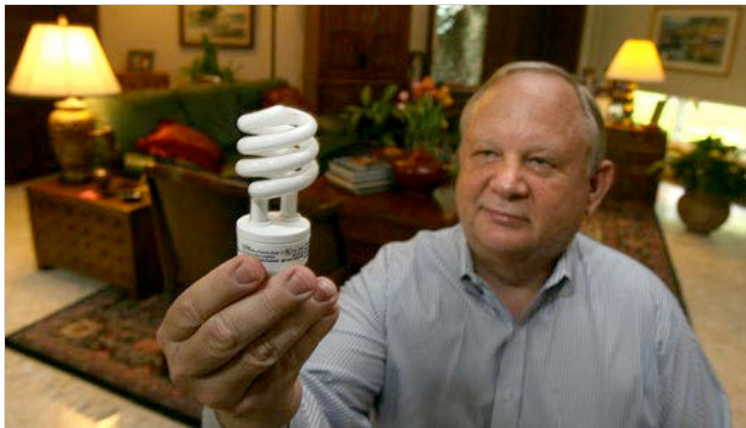
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GREEN LIGHTS: Bill Barker looks at the type of compact fluorescent light bulb that he uses throughout his home. These bulbs use less electricity than typical incandescent bulbs and help to save energy. (Photo: John Davenport/San Antonio Express-News/ZUMA Press)

Maybe you resolved to save more money in 2012. Maybe you resolved to reduce your carbon footprint. You can do both if you know **how to save energy at home**. The typical household spends more than \$2,000 a year on energy costs. While you can cut your energy costs by 25 percent or more, some of the necessary steps — replacing old windows, for example — require you to spend money now to save money over the long run.

The free online [Home Energy Saver](#) figures your home's energy use based on models and data developed at the U.S. Department of Energy's Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. The calculator then recommends upgrades that would cut energy use and provides a break down of the costs and benefits.

But there are plenty of things you can do *right now* to save money by saving energy at home without making a trip to the home improvement store. Changes in habit and small investments can add up to major savings.

Heating & cooling

About half of your energy use is for heating and cooling your house or apartment. Among the simple, and free, ways to improve efficiency:

- Move furniture away from air registers so that heated air can circulate freely.
- On sunny, chilly winter days open the drapes or curtains on the south and west side to take advantage of passive solar heating.
- Adjust your thermostat before leaving for work. You can cut your heating and cooling costs by 10 percent by adjusting the thermostat 7-10 degrees for eight hours a day. A programmable thermostat makes this easier.

Installing a programmable thermostat is a low cost way to cut energy costs and there are others:

- Check your air filter monthly and change it if it looks dirty. Change it every three

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months — at least. A dirty filter makes your heating/cooling system work harder.

- Sealing and insulating your air ducts provides big bang for your buck, even if it is not the best way to spend a Saturday. Your tax dollars paid for a do-it-yourself guide to sealing and insulating air ducts that can be found on the [Energy Star website](#).

Hot water

Heating hot water for baths, laundry and dishwashing gobbles up about 18 percent of the energy used in a typical household. If you have an electric hot water heater, it uses more than twice the energy of any other appliance in the house.

Taking cold showers will cut your energy use, but here are some more pleasant ways to save:

- Changing your water heater thermostat from 140 F to 120 F or lower may save you more than \$100 a year.
- A low-flow showerhead using 2.5 gallons-per-minute means you're heating much less water. The water savings could cut your electric bill by up to \$145 a year.
- Washing your clothes in cold water may save you \$30 to \$40 a year — and you don't have to worry about turning your underwear pink.
- If your electric hot water heater tank feels warm to the touch, you're wasting energy. Wrapping the tank with an insulating jacket may save your \$30 a year. Wrapping a gas-fired hot water tank requires more care to make sure you don't cover the flue or burner.

Lighting

Heating the air and water in your home sucks up most of the energy, but lighting the inside and outside of your house represents about 12 percent of your electric bill, making a trip to the hardware store worthwhile.

- Replacing old light bulbs in the five most frequently used fixtures in your house with compact fluorescent light bulbs or LED bulbs could save you up to \$65 a year. The ENERGY STAR qualified bulbs cost more, but last longer.
- Turning off lights really does save money. One 60-watt incandescent bulb burning eight hours costs you about \$15 a year.

Have other tips for how to save energy at home? Leave us a note in the comments below.

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