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## Cut home energy bills

By Marshall Loeb, MarketWatch

NEW YORK (MarketWatch) - Fuel costs are up. So is the average house size, the number of appliances we use and the level of comfort we expect year-round in our home. Of course, being comfortable - or lazy - has a price, and you want to cut your energy bills.

Heating and cooling, including water, account for 56% of home energy costs, reports the U.S. Department of Energy. You already know the obvious: don't set your air conditioning so low, use an automatic thermostat to regulate your home's temperature and buy appliances that bear the government's Energy Star seal, indicating efficiency. But, according to our national laboratories, there's plenty more we can do.

For example, an air-conditioner in the shade uses as much as 10% less power than one in the sun, so consider planting around a central unit or placing a window unit on the north side of your home. Likewise, make sure your thermostat doesn't sit next to a hot lamp or appliance.

You may not have a green thumb, but the Department of Energy believes that just three properly located trees can save an average household \$100 to \$250 a year in energy costs. An energy-efficient ceiling fan is also a great way to circulate cool air through your house.

Reducing the temperature of your hot water by 10 degrees will save you 3% to 5% on energy costs. Many manufacturers set water-heater thermostats at 140 degrees while most of us can make do with 120 or even 115 degrees.

That trick works even better if your dishwasher has a built-in booster heater: the feature will pay for itself in about a year. Shorter wash cycles are also a money-saving feature.

If you plan to be out of town for more than a few days, you can turn your water heater thermostat down to its lowest setting, or turn off the heater completely.

When it comes to washing machines, front-loaders use less water and new, energy-efficient models can cost a third as much to operate as older washers.




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Originally published on April 11, 2006

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