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YOUR HOME

Taking Action to Save on Heating

By JAY ROMANO
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WITH winter approaching, and heating costs showing no signs of dropping with the temperature, homeowners will be looking for ways to get the biggest bang for their energy dollar.



Tom Bloom

Lorene Bartos, an extension educator for the [University of Nebraska](#) Lincoln Extension, recited a list of standard energy-saving actions: caulk and weatherstrip windows and doors, insulate the attic, seal or remove window air-conditioners, clean or replace furnace filters.

But there are also other ways to save on energy costs bit by bit, she said.

For example, homeowners can use passive solar heat by allowing sunlight in through south-facing windows. At the same time, windows facing west and north should have window shades down or window treatments closed to keep heat inside, and all windows should be covered at night. Ms. Bartos said heating ducts should be checked for leakage and any leaks sealed with duct mastic covered with fiberglass mesh and another layer of mastic.

Ted Funk, an extension specialist in agricultural engineering at the [University of Illinois](#) in Urbana, said homeowners should be careful about using a fireplace to supplement their heat. "A fireplace is a recipe for heat loss," he said, explaining that even with glass doors, fireplaces may be no more than 40 percent efficient.

Owners might also want to conduct a Web-based audit of their homes that will provide some tips for energy saving. "Lawrence Berkeley Labs has a good energy-saving tool," he said. "You put in your ZIP code, and it will show you some priorities to work on." (The Web site: hes.lbl.gov/)

Celia Kuperszmid Lehrman, a deputy editor of Consumer Reports in Yonkers, says using a programmable thermostat is usually a good idea. Setting the temperature back to 65 or so overnight, or during the day when no one will be home, can save money.

One thing people should be cautious about is responding to offers from alternative energy providers, she said. Sometimes these offers, which seem to promise savings, include late fees and cancellation fees.

Henry Gifford, the owner of Architecture and Energy Ltd. in [Manhattan](#), said people considering replacing their furnace, boiler or water heater should consider "sealed combustion" models, which do not use conventional chimneys. "Instead, they use two pipes: a sidewall exhaust vent in the way a clothing dryer vents out the wall, and another pipe to bring outdoor air in for combustion," he said. These appliances save energy by avoiding pulling heated air out of the house.

Another way to save energy is to install a tankless hot water heater. With tankless heaters, the water is heated only when the hot water is being used. (Tank-type heaters keep the water at a preset temperature all the time.)

Lewis Linsky, general manager of Seneca Plumbing and Heating Supply in Buffalo, said that while a tankless heater costs more to buy and install than a tank-type heater, it should save money in the long run by eliminating the "standby loss" of a tank-type heater.

And since some heaters come with remote controls for setting the temperature, water being used for a dishwasher can be set high enough to eliminate the need for the built-in electric heater that most dishwashers use. "But the best thing about a tankless heater is that you never run out of hot

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