

# Rockford Register Star rrstar.com

 Print This Page

 Close window

**Published: December 31, 2006**

**Business**

## **Energy Thieves**

**Anything that stays plugged in — appliances, computers, televisions — can be costing you money**

**By Rowena Vergara**

ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR

[Click here for more information about Rowena Vergara](#)

All through your home and office, thieves are stealing small chunks of electricity.

A couple of watts here, a couple of watts there are sucked away 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

That dribble of power is known in the industry as a “phantom load,” when energy is being used by an appliance that is plugged in, but switched off.

CD players,  
VCRs, TVs,**Related Media**

Stats on electricity usage over the past 10 years

**Resources to help you save**

**www.energystar.gov:** Provides energy-saving tips like how to pick out efficient bulbs and appliances

**www.exeloncorp.com/ourcompanies/comed/comedres/energy\_rates/ratecalc.htm:** Tool through ComEd that helps determine what your monthly electricity bill could look like.

**hes.lbl.gov:** Home Energy Saver, Department of Energy-sponsored site.

**New programs offered by ComEd**

**Real-Time Pricing program:** This new program will be available in January to any customer who typically uses the most electricity during off-peak hours. If you tend to run your dishwasher, washer or dryer for example late at night, you may be interested in signing up for this hourly usage program. Consumers could possibly save money on their bills with this option. Speak with a ComEd representative first about how much you could save before applying.

**Voluntary Rate Stabilization Program:** The Illinois Commerce Commission approved a rate phase-in program Dec. 20 meant to assist low-income ComEd customers. The program allows customers to reduce their increase to a maximum of 10 percent for each of the next three years. They would then defer the additional amount to a three-year repayment period beginning in 2010. An interest rate of 3.25 percent would accrue on the amounts deferred. The program is voluntary and customers can enroll until Aug. 22. The program will not go into effect until April, according to ComEd.

**Frequently used appliances**

Here are a few typical wattages of commonly used appliances in the home. You can find the wattage of any appliance on the bottom or back of the product. The wattage listed refers to the maximum power that can be drawn by that appliance when in use.

**Clock radio** = 10 watts

**Coffee maker** = 900 to 1,200 watts

**Clothes washer** = 300 to 500 watts

**Clothes dryer** = 1,800 to 5,000 watts

**Dishwasher** = 1,200 to 2,400 watts

**Hair dryer** = 1,200 to 1,875 watts

**Microwave** = 750 to 1,110 watts

**19-inch television** = 65 to 110 watts

**Refrigerator, 16 cubic feet** = 725 watts

**Stereo** = 70 to 400 watts

*Source: U.S. Department of Energy A Consumer's Guide to Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy*

**Some money-saving tips**

- If you turn your computer desktop and monitor off for two hours a day, you can reduce electric consumption by up to 1.5 percent.
- Plug frequently used appliances like televisions, DVD players and stereos into one power strip with an on-off button. Unplug the power strip when the appliances are not in use.
- Place timers on your lights. If you usually keep an outdoor light on overnight, set a timer that will automatically turn it on and off as needed, in order to save electricity.

*Source: ComEd*



Post a Comment | View All

barryfle wrote:

So, unplug TV's VCR etc. every time not in use. Yeah, sure. That would mean I would have to reset everything every time I turned them back on. Get real.

Besides, what is the point? Lets say everyone does that. I can tell you exactly what will happen. ComEd will cry

they are losing money because every one is cutting back and want yet another rate increase. It happen here in Freeport with our water bills.

Posted: Sun Dec 31, 2006 11:15 am

[Post a Comment](#) | [View All](#)

#### Related News from the Web

- ▶ Environmental Law
- ▶ Home Listing
- ▶ Home
- ▶ Law
- ▶ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- ▶ Science / Technology
- ▶ Alternative Energy

Powered by Topix.net

microwaves, alarm clocks and printers are the usual suspects. The average home has 25 or more of these energy vampires, according to the power company Ameren. Any appliance or charging device that has a cube-shaped transformer on the end of its cord also is creating a phantom load.

All that power drain can cost you several dollars a month, according to Ameren.

With electric bills going up at the start of the new year — by as much as 26 percent — this is a good time to take a look at where your energy use is going.

Most residential users in the Rock River Valley are on the ComEd grid. ComEd's 10-year rate freeze ends this month and Chicago-based consumer watchdog group Citizens' Utility Board estimates that the average ComEd customer will pay about \$160 more per year on their bill.

But consumers can find answers to some electricity woes right in the products and appliances used daily at home.

Dealing with phantom loads is a start.

The U.S. Department of Energy also recommends unplugging any appliances or electronics that don't need to stay charged day and night.

For any single appliance the load is never that large — the most inefficient designs draw 15 to 20 watts. But multiply that by every home in the U.S. and you're talking billions of watts.

Nationally, phantom 6 percent of our energy consumption. This translates into billions of dollars.

Changing the yellow light bulbs in your home could save you some green. So could unplugging your television or stereo before you walk out the door.

Another savings can be found in your light sockets. Start with switching out the incandescent light bulbs in your home for compact fluorescent light bulbs or CFLs.

CFLs use 75 percent less energy than standard incandescent bulbs and last 10 times longer, said Carolyn Collopy of the Midwest Energy Efficiency Alliance based in Chicago.

Collopy and other energy experts say it's the No. 1 way residents can lower their bill. For best results, replace bulbs you use frequently in your home first, such as those in the kitchen, dining room or outside on the porch to name a few.

The bulbs can be found in most hardware stores. CFLs come in a variety of colors like standard bulbs do, but they are spiral-shaped instead of bulb-shaped.

#### Kilowatt hours

Also know how you are being charged for electricity. Consumers are charged for electric by their usage of kilowatt hours. The easiest way to remember that conversion is to know that 1 kilowatt equals 1,000 watts. Those 1,000 watts must work for one hour to be considered a kilowatt-hour.

Purchase appliances stamped with the Energy Star label from now on. Appliances like refrigerators, dishwashers and clothes dryers with an "Energy Star" label meet the energy guidelines set by the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy.

Visit the Energy Star site at [www.energystar.gov](http://www.energystar.gov) to shop for products and locate them in stores around the Rock River Valley.

And, if you do decide to purchase new, more efficient appliances, do not continue to use your old ones, Collopy suggested.

"A lot of people will take the old fridge and put that in the garage and those suck up a lot of energy. Same with freezers," she said.

The Department of Energy also recommends replacing refrigerators more than 10 years old. According to a Department of Energy sponsored Web site, Home Energy Saver at [www.hes.lbl.gov](http://www.hes.lbl.gov), new efficiency standards went into effect in 1992. Older refrigerators could cost two to three times more to run than a new unit, according to the site.

### **Biggest savings**

Still, switching to light bulbs will result in the most savings, although some consumers have avoided purchasing the alternative, Collopy said.

CFLs, although more energy efficient, are more expensive than incandescent bulbs at the store, but can translate to more savings in the long run.

When CFLs were first introduced, consumers complained that it took longer for them to turn on at the flip of a switch, Collopy said. The spiral bulbs were also bigger than their counterparts.

That belief has since changed as technology advanced.

"Still, CFLs are not as easy to find. You go to the grocery store and you'll have a whole shelf of incandescent and not so much of the CFL. But, they have come a long way," Collopy said.

ComEd has also prepared for the rate increase with tips on its Web site and information on a few new programs that some residents could qualify for to lower their bills. The company provides a tool to help residents estimate how much more they could pay next year at [comedrates.com](http://comedrates.com). Select the bill estimator tool.

*Staff writer Rowena Vergara may be reached at [rvergara@rrstar.com](mailto:rvergara@rrstar.com) or 815-987-1341.*

 Print This Page

 Close window

**Rockford Register Star**  **rrstar.com**