

FAMILY FOCUS COLUMN

Send to media October 16-20, 2006

Media releases October 23-27, 2006

Save Heating Dollars

By Mary Beth Kaufman, ISU Extension Specialist, Family Resource Management

No matter what kind of equipment heats your home, one thing is certain: The more energy-efficient the heating system is, the lower your utility bills will be. According to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), the combination of a tight, well-insulated home, a properly maintained, high-efficiency heating system and reasonable thermostat settings can cut your annual heating bill by as much as one-half.

The DOE says you can save as much as one percent on your heating bill for every degree you reduce your thermostat setting for at least eight hours per day. If you have an older thermostat, you can save heating dollars by following these suggestions.

- When you're home, set your thermostat at 70° F. or lower. If you feel slightly chilly, add another layer of clothing.
- Choose a lower thermostat setting at night or when you're away. It costs less to reheat your home to a comfortable level than it does to heat it while you're sleeping or gone.
- Keep the thermostat setting constant for long periods. Frequently changing the thermostat causes the heating system to cycle and run too often, wasting energy.

One of the best energy-saving investments you can make is installing a programmable thermostat, which will automatically handle the daily heating and cooling system temperature changes for you all year long. An ENERGY STAR® qualified programmable thermostat costs anywhere from \$40 to \$100 (or more) and can pay for itself in less than a year.

Follow these additional tips to stay warm and comfortable.

- Open window coverings on south-facing windows to take advantage of solar heat gain. Letting the sunshine into your home can provide enough heat to reduce the load on your heating system. As soon as the sun stops shining, cover the windows to minimize heat loss.
- Cover east-, north- and west-facing windows. Heavy curtains or insulated shades are best for covering these windows and reducing chills when it's dark. Also keep these windows covered during daytime—unless you need the natural light—since there will be little solar heat gain.
- Repair damaged storm windows. Storm windows can reduce heat loss by 25 to 50 percent. Make sure the glass isn't cracked and that the weather stripping is in good shape around each window's perimeter.
- Wash south-facing windows. Dirt and grime on windows can reflect part of the solar heat gain you'd otherwise get from these windows.
- Trim trees and bushes in front of windows. Deciduous trees and shrubs will drop their leaves to let in sunshine. Cut back other types that block the low winter sun.
- Warm up your bed. Turn down your thermostat and add blankets, quilts or an electric blanket or mattress pad to stay toasty at night.
- Vacuum baseboard heaters, air registers or radiators. When you see dust, dirt and lint building up, clean these devices.
- Move furniture or window coverings that are blocking air registers, baseboard heaters or radiators. Make sure all the heated air you're paying for is being distributed throughout the room.
- Install radiator reflectors. These panels will help reflect heat away from walls and into rooms.

The information in this article was taken from the Home Series booklets which are filled with everyday energy-saving tips to help lowans make a positive impact on family budgets. They are available free of charge from the Iowa Energy Center. To obtain copies:

- Inquire at your utility company.
- Download a PDF copy at the Iowa Energy Center Web site: www.energy.iastate.edu/.
- Request a copy by e-mailing the Iowa Energy Center at iec@energy.iastate.edu.
- Call the Iowa Energy Center at 515-294-8819 to ask for a copy by mail.

Small energy-efficiency projects such as sealing air leaks or weather-stripping windows are easy to do yourself and are relatively inexpensive. However, when it's time to purchase a new heating and cooling system, talk with your utility company as they may offer rebates on some systems. Also get in touch with the Community Action Agency in your area about government-sponsored assistance and grant programs designed for low-income and elderly homeowners.

The Energy Policy Act of 2005 includes special tax credits for homeowners who make energy-saving improvements to their homes between January 1, 2006 and December 31, 2007. Eligible items include insulation systems, exterior windows and doors, circulating fans, furnaces, solar panels, and solar water heaters.