

INSIDE GRUNDY COUNTY
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Ways to Reduce Home Energy Use

The cool weather these past few days have reminded me that even cooler temperatures are on their way. With cooler temperatures coming, now might be a good time to look around your home and see where energy saving steps can be taken to reduce home energy use. The following tips are not new but hopefully will serve as a reminder of steps that can be taken to reduce energy costs and improve the comfort of your home.

Plug draft sources that permit cold air into your home. Applying weather-stripping and caulk to openings around windows, doors, chimneys, attic accesses and above the foundation walls are good places to begin this process. If you can, enter the house in a protected area, such as an attached garage or vestibule which can reduce heat loss.

It is recommended that routine maintenance be completed every year on your heating system. Changing filters frequently is another way to maintain the efficiency of the heating system. Sealing leaks in heating ducts, and insulating heating ducts with six inches of insulation in exposed outside areas, will also help reduce heating costs. If you have an old furnace, you may want to consider replacing it with an energy efficient one.

Control indoor temperatures by heating only the necessary rooms and closing off those you do not use throughout the winter. Turning down the thermostat when you are gone or during the night will further reduce fuel consumption. A programmable thermostat can do this for you. For each degree Fahrenheit that you reduce the home temperature, there will be approximately a three percent fuel savings.

Storm windows reduce heat loss by fifty percent compared to a single pane window. If you add a third layer of glass or plastic, it will reduce heat loss by another third. Using movable insulation either on the inside or outside of the window will further reduce heat loss. Insulated shutters or heavy drapes can lower heating costs as well.

If you need to add insulation, you may want to use a professional contractor. This is the most expensive and complicated of the steps that have been highlighted. Use proven materials and install them correctly. When it comes to insulation, R value is important to understand. R value refers to the effectiveness of different types and thicknesses of insulation. Areas of the home to consider insulating first include the attic or ceiling, top of the foundation walls, insulating over unheated areas (such as crawl spaces), exposed foundation walls and insulating uninsulated frame walls (which is usually the most difficult and most costly).

Lastly, it is important to control excessive moisture in the home. If you have a humidifier on your furnace, set it around thirty five percent humidity. Also, limit the use of portable humidifiers. Proper indoor humidity levels will help you feel warmer while minimizing the problems that can occur from too much humidity.

If you would like more information on improving the energy efficiency of your home, contact the Grundy office of ISU Extension at 319-824-6979 and ask for the Home Series publications.