

How Effective Are Your Energy-Efficient Efforts?

Home Builders Association Green Building Council

Energy efficiency is all the buzz right now — it is not only earth-friendly, but it can also be friendly to your wallet. But are you doing the right things to get the most out of your efforts to be “green”?

A study by the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences shows that of the more than 500 people surveyed about energy efficiency most mentioned curtailing their energy use rather than investing in efficiency improvements as a way to live greener. While curtailment is a positive move, most people don't realize that they can get more long-term benefits — both environmentally and financially — by investing in upgrades to the home.

You don't need to choose one or the other, however. While investing in system upgrades provides a higher percentage of energy savings, combining curtailment efforts with system upgrades could yield up to a 30 percent savings on your energy bill.

A study by Gerald Gardner and Paul Stern shows some of the most effective ways to save energy and money in both categories:

Curtailment

Curtailing your current lifestyle involves a continuous, active effort by household members. Like the suggestions listed below, they often involve very low to no cost to the home owner. What you can do today:

- Replace 85 percent of your incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent ones.
- When heating your home, reduce the temperature from 72 degrees to 68 degrees during the day and even further down to 65 degrees at night.
- Wash your clothes in warm and cold temperatures, rather than hot.

These three simple steps can save you more than 8 percent on your energy bill and cost little if no money to implement.

Increased efficiency

While curtailment is not only smart but low cost, investing in energy-efficient upgrades to your home will provide the most significant changes to your energy bill — and to the planet. Upgrades involve some initial costs upfront but will give you a return on your investment tenfold over time. What you can do this week, month or year:

- Caulk and weather-strip your home. By reducing air leaks, an average household can cut 10 percent of their monthly energy bill.
- Install or upgrade your attic insulation, particularly in homes built prior to 1980. Look for R-values between 30 and 60 — the higher the R-value, the better.
- Install a more efficient water heater. Consider a tankless water heater which can be comparable in cost to traditional gas water heaters but are 30 percent more efficient, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.
- Consider a programmable thermostat which automatically lowers the heat at night or when you are not home, and can save you up to 10 percent on your annual heating bill.

To find a builder or remodeler in your area that can help you with these upgrades, contact the Home Builders Association at (618) 343-6331 or visit the Green Building Council section of the HBA website at www.hbaswil.org. You can also follow us on facebook at www.facebook.com/hbaswil