

Conservation Corner #4 (Appeared in *Ferry County View* November 26, 2014)

Easy, Low-Cost Ways to Save Energy

Brrrr... The warm fall weather has ended and the home heating season is in full swing. This is a good time of the year to be thinking about saving energy. Whether your heat source is electricity, firewood, pellets, heating oil or propane, the more of it you use to stay warm, the more it costs, in dollars and/or muscle power. Fortunately, there are a number of ways you can save money and effort, as well as conserve natural resources and shrink your carbon footprint.

Though saving energy by undertaking major retrofitting of your house and heating system may be something to consider in the future, this article will focus on ways you can cut your usage with minimal effort and very little monetary outlay.

First, check your home for air leaks. Look for daylight around and under doors and windows. Check for windows that rattle, a telltale sign that they are not airtight. Can you slide a dollar bill easily under your outside door? Feel for drafts near electrical outlet and switch plates and exhaust fans.

If your windows are drafty, you can seal them with plastic film. Caulk non-opening windows if there are gaps in the frame. Use weather stripping if you will be opening and closing them. As for doors, add a sweep on the bottom to reduce drafts. A door draft stopper, essentially a fabric "snake" filled with rice (can be homemade) and placed along the floor, is another good low-tech way to stop cold air from infiltrating.



Air leaks around electrical plates can be easily plugged with insulating foam sealers purchased at most hardware or building supply stores. Spray foam is useful for filling gaps around fans and ducts which penetrate the exterior walls.

Take advantage of the sun. On a sunny day, heat enters a house through the south facing, and to a lesser degree, the east and west facing windows, in the form of solar radiation. Even on a very cold day, this sunlight will warm your house. However, when the sun is not shining, at night or on cloudy days, even the most modern energy efficient windows will not insulate as well as walls do. Radiation will carry the house's heat right back out through the windows. Therefore, for maximum efficiency it is imperative that window treatments of some kind be in place. Draperies and shades are effective, as are rigid foam panels. Thick insulated curtains, known as window "quilts" can be purchased or constructed. In a pinch, blankets can be hung up to act as temporary curtains. Each of these treatments will work best if snugly sealed

around the window. If you don't expect the sun to shine while you are away from home, leave the curtains closed. In fact, the north windows can remain covered all winter to conserve energy.

Close doors and heating vents to rooms when they are not being used. There is no need to heat that extra room (be careful - a room with water pipes does need to be kept to a minimum temperature). Some areas of the house may be closed off completely.

If you have central heat, install programmable thermostats. This will allow you to schedule the heat to drop during the day when you are gone, or at night when you are asleep. Consider turning the thermostat down and wearing more clothes. A space heater can heat a small work space while the rest of the house is cooler. Extra blankets can make a cool bedroom very comfortable for sleeping.

If wood is your primary heat source, most likely you have a woodstove. If you heat with propane, electricity or oil, you may have a fireplace you use occasionally. Everyone loves the coziness of sitting around a crackling fire on a cold winter night. Though this type of fire does warm your body and your spirit, an open fireplace will suck a great amount of air (some of which may have been heated by your central heating system) up the chimney. A glass door in front of your fireplace will allow you to still enjoy the fire, without watching your heating dollars go up the chimney. And, by all means, make sure the flue is closed between fires.

Heating (and the utility bill) is on everyone's mind as the mercury drops outside. These are a few low cost ideas to help you start saving money and resources without sacrificing comfort. In a future article, we will discuss bigger projects you can carry out to conserve heating energy.

Meanwhile...let it snow, let it snow, let it snow.

For lots more great ideas and details, visit the Department of Energy's website:
(click on this link: <http://energy.gov/energysaver/articles/fall-and-winter-energy-saving-tips>)