



10 Ways to Beat High Energy Costs in 2010

Saving energy is not only good for the environment, but it's also a good way to save money on household bills. It is common to overuse electricity by force of habit or simply by a lack of awareness that there are ways of cutting down on power consumption. Therefore, simple measures can make a huge difference. So let's have a look at ten common sense suggestions and tips that will help decrease your energy costs for 2010.

1) Perform a home energy audit. It helps you assess how much energy your home uses and evaluate what measures you can take to improve efficiency. Energy Star® has an [online facility](#) that helps you compare your home's energy efficiency to similar homes across the country and get recommendations for energy-saving home improvements. You will need to enter some basic information about your home (such as zip code, age, square footage, and number of occupants). You will also need your last 12 months of utility bills. If you don't have your bills, contact your utility for a 12-month summary.

2) INSULATE! According to the Department of Energy, 44% of the energy used in the average American home goes toward heating and cooling. Inadequate insulation means hot and cold air leak out, thus making electricity bills higher. [Simplyinsulate.com](#) says there are 46 million under-insulated homes in the United States, according to a study carried out by the Harvard University School of Public Health. If your home is between 5 and 10 years old, you're likely to be living in one of them. Insulation is one of the cheapest ways to improve energy efficiency, comfort and long-term savings. Visit the website and find out more about financial incentives available in each American state for purchasing and installing insulation. Insulation is particularly important in the attic, walls, and floors. Your water heater should be insulated too! The amount of energy you conserve will depend on your local climate, the size,



shape, and construction of your house, and the type and efficiency of the heating and cooling systems, among other factors.

3) Unplug electronics. Even when switched off, domestic appliances and electronics continue to draw small amounts of electricity known as “phantom load”. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, 75 percent of the electricity used to power home electronics is consumed when they are turned off, adding up to 10 percent of your monthly electric bills. Computers, television sets, VCRs, stereos, and kitchen appliances are some of the biggest guzzlers. Most people tend to leave them plugged in without realizing that they continue to consume power when switched off. Use a power strip with an on/off switch to fully power down home electronics while in standby mode. Unplug or switch off all nonessential devices when preparing to travel out of town. Unplug chargers after the device has been recharged. Plug all major home electronics, such as TVs and DVD players, into power strips and turn the power strips off when the equipment is not in use (TVs and DVDs in standby mode still use several watts of power). Turn off the computer and monitor when not in use. Alternatively, set computer energy settings to hibernate or sleep rather than using screen savers, which do not save as much energy.

4) Replace light bulbs. Energy used from home lighting accounts for about 10 percent of your electric bill. Double-check the wattage size of the light bulbs in your house and replace 100-watt (or larger) bulbs with 60-watt or 75-watt bulbs. Also, change your lights to energy-saving compact fluorescent lights (CFL). The average CFL lasts 10,000 hours and when you replace it, you can recycle it. They come in a variety of colors, shapes and sizes.

5) Compare rates. Depending on which state you live in, you may cut down on your electricity bill simply by switching to a different energy provider. A simple switch to a provider that uses renewable energy or one that fixes your bill for a year or more could generate savings of 5% to 15% a month. Be aware that most contracts require a year-long commitment and fees are applicable if you breach them.



6) Upgrade your old energy guzzling systems. If your heating or cooling equipment is more than 15 years old, you should replace it with a newer, energy-efficient unit. A new unit would greatly reduce your energy consumption, especially if the existing equipment is in poor condition. It's also advisable to inspect this type of equipment annually, or as recommended by the manufacturer. If you have a forced-air furnace, check your filters and replace them as needed. Generally, you should change them about once every month or two, especially during periods of high usage. Have a professional HVAC technician check and clean your equipment once a year. Check your ductwork for dirt streaks, especially near seams. These streaks indicate air leaks, and they should be sealed with duct mastic. Insulate any ducts or pipes that travel through unheated spaces.

7) Solar panels. Install solar electric panels on your roof. Solar is a clean, renewable energy and not subject to price increases. It is quite abundant in many parts of the United States. Rebates through your utility plus state and federal tax credits can offset upfront costs by as much as 50 percent.

8) Buy Energy Star®. Whenever you purchase a new home appliance, look for the Energy Star® label. The label means the product meets strict efficiency guidelines set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy. Simply by purchasing appliances with better energy efficiency, you can lower your overall energy consumption. For more information, visit energystar.gov.

9) Tax credits. Apply for tax credits if you purchase an energy-efficient product or renewable energy system for your home. A useful website to use is DSIRE, which can show you federal, state, local, and utility incentives which can save you thousands of dollars a year on renewable energy and energy efficient purchases.



10) Miscellaneous: Keep doors closed when heating or air conditioning a room. It takes less power to warm up or cool down a room whose doors are shut. By doing that you'll be able to get an adequate temperature in about 10 minutes on a low setting. Keep your refrigerator and the coils on the backside of it clean. Caulk window seals around the glass to produce additional insulation. Replace your current thermostat with a digital programmable thermostat. Wash your clothes on cold water and run only one cycle a month on hot with bleach to keep your whites bright. Install solar water heating, and incorporate natural daylight by landscaping your property according to its micro and regional climate.

By implementing some of these energy saving tips, you can decrease your energy consumption and lower your annual energy costs. For more energy saving tips and [alternative energy](#) news, be sure to follow EnergyRefuge.com on our [website](#) and our [rss feed](#).

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