

Take the Chill Out of Winter Bills

Source: NRECA Straight Talk

Between holiday houseguests and shorter, colder days, electric bills tend to climb in the winter. Read on for ways to save energy when the temperature drops.

Lower your thermostat to 68 degrees (or lower): If you decrease the temperature by just one degree, you can save up to 5 percent on heating costs. Consider a programmable thermostat that you can set to lower the temperature when away from home and increase before you come back.

Check furnace filters: Be sure to clean or replace your heating and cooling system's air filter. At a minimum change the filter every three months; a dirty filter clogs the system, making the system work harder to keep you warm.

Adjust blinds and curtains: Keep them open to let in sunlight during the day, and close at night to keep heat inside and protect from drafts.

Reduce hot water temperatures: Heating water accounts for 12 percent of the average home's energy use. Set your water heater's thermostat to 120 degrees—that's usually sufficient for a household's hot-water needs. Also, if you've had your water heater for more than 12 years, you might want to consider replacing it with a more energy-efficient model.

Insulate water heaters and pipes: Wrap water pipes connected to the water heater with foam, and insulate the water heater, too.

Seal and insulate: This is the best way to keep heat in and air out. Areas that may need sealing include corners, cracks, door frames, and windows.

Consider replacing old appliances, doors, and windows with ENERGY STAR-rated models: You can save about 15 percent of your normal energy use with these appliances and get better insulation on doors and windows for the price you pay. ENERGY STAR-rated items meet special efficiency standards set by the federal government.

Free your vents: HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) systems will have to work twice as hard if vents are blocked by rugs, furniture, or doors. Keep vents clear for proper air flow.

Keep food cool: Don't make your fridge work too hard. A temperature set between 34 and 37 degrees Fahrenheit is usually sufficient.

A special holiday tip: Use LED lights to decorate. They're up to 75 percent more energy efficient than traditional incandescent lights and last much longer—but check for an ENERGY-STAR rating before you buy. Cheaper LEDs tend not to last as long or be as durable.

Log on to your Arkansas Valley Electric Account to keep up with your usage: If we've had a few days of frigid temperatures, see how you can try to save on days that are milder.

Using the tips above can certainly help you manage your energy use, but your bill may still be higher than normal in winter months. Why?

- The weather makes a big impact on electric bills. The average family spends \$2,024 a year on energy; nearly half of that goes towards heating and cooling costs.
- Even those with the most efficient HVAC systems will see more use in extreme weather.
- When extreme cold temperatures hit, our heaters work overtime.
- For example, even if you set your thermostat to our recommended 68 degrees in the winter, when it is 19 degrees outside, your system has to work hard to make up that 49-degree difference.
- Your heater works harder and cycles on and off more often, making your use much higher. That means your bill will be much higher.
- Remember, there is value in comfort. For us to be comfortable in our homes, our heaters are going to work harder, but it may be worth the additional cost to you.