

How to keep your electric bill from ballooning

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As I crunched my way through frozen snow this morning it was apparent that winter weather has descended upon the Kittitas Valley. Though the blanketing snow can be quite picturesque, these dropping temperatures can have the unfortunate side effect of rising energy bills.

When outside is below freezing, it can be tempting to stay in, turn up the heat and rely on electronics for evening entertainment, all to the detriment of your pocketbook. Statistics from the region show that harsh winter conditions can end up doubling or even tripling a family's usual electric costs.

It may seem like the only options are to pay through the nose or freeze, but there are actually a number of tips and low-cost tricks to help bring down those high heating bills.

Perhaps one of the easiest steps you can take is to turn down your thermostat, just a little. Keeping your home at a moderate 65 to 68 degrees while using a blanket to make up the difference in comfort can be an effective strategy. Additionally, setting the thermostat another 5 to 10 degrees cooler at night, or when you're outside the home, can make the impact even greater.

If you find yourself spending most of your time in only one part of your home, it may be beneficial to turn your furnace down even further and grab a space heater to increase the temperature in the rooms you currently occupy.

Sometimes the issue with staying warm has more to do with the way air moves through your home. Taking an afternoon to go around your home looking for leaky spots to cover or fill in can increase the amount of heat that stays in your home. One fairly quick and cost-effective option is to cover your windows with plastic or specially designed window insulation kits. For an even lower-cost solution you can opt to hang extra blankets or towels over your windows. Just make sure to secure the blanket or plastic all the way around the window so air has a minimal chance of sneaking out. Adding vinyl weather-stripping around windows and doors, as well as door sweeps under external doors, also helps limit the exchange of hot and cold air.

If you have a little spare cash and some free time, stopping by the hardware store to pick up mastic, caulking or other sealant products can be quite useful. Use mastic to seal the seams in ductwork by applying a layer about a quarter-inch thick around those seams and any gaps in the heating registers of your home. Caulking and foam sealants can be used to close gaps left in the

spot where pipes enter the walls under the sinks in your home. Repairing any larger holes in the walls throughout your home is also beneficial to your overall comfort and savings.

Hopefully these tips and tricks will help you conserve energy and save a little cash. All of us at HopeSource wish you a safe and happy winter.

Sonya Rombough is the conservation education coordinator and AmeriCorps volunteer serving the community alongside the HopeSource team.