

Common Energy-Saving Claims

Q: Is it true that turning lights off and on uses more energy than just leaving them on?

A: Not true. Turning off lights reduces energy use. Turn off LED and incandescent bulbs every time you leave the room. The situation is a little different with compact fluorescent bulbs. Turning them off does save energy, but can shorten the life of the bulb. The rule of thumb for CFLs is to turn them off any time they won't be used for 15 minutes or more.

Q: Would replacing my old windows with new, more efficient ones really cut my energy use in half?

A: No. While replacing inefficient windows with new, energy-efficient windows can cut the heat loss through windows in half, windows typically account for only about 25% to 30% of your space heating costs. The amount of energy you use for heating and cooling is likely one-third to one-half of your total energy use, so replacing your old windows might only reduce your total energy costs by about 10%. When you consider the high cost of new windows, you may not recoup your investment for 15 or 20 years, or even longer.

Q: Burning wood in my fireplace should save on my heating costs, right?

A: Possibly, but certain conditions need to be met. The wood should be dry and burned efficiently in a properly installed, properly placed, high-efficiency wood stove or fireplace insert. Otherwise, it's likely you will lose as much heat through your chimney as you're distributing throughout the house.

Q: My kids claim using the dishwasher is just as efficient as washing dishes by hand. Are they right?

A: Yes. In fact, it's usually more efficient. Properly used dishwashers use less water while doing a better job. As a bonus, they can save you more than 200 hours a year. For maximum energy savings, make sure your water heater is set to about 120 F and use the most efficient wash/dry settings.

Q: I've heard it's better to heat individual rooms with an electric space heater and keep the doors closed to trap the heat. Is this true?

A: It's possible to save money with an electric space heater if you use it only a few hours a day and reduce your home's thermostat setting by a couple degrees. But space heaters can cause fires, so they need to be used wisely and never left unattended.

Q: Should I close the vents in rooms that aren't being used?

A: Most experts advise against this because closing supply registers forces your furnace or air-conditioning unit to work harder. They advise keeping all your vents and doors open. If your system supplies too much heat to some rooms and too little to other rooms, talk to a heating and air conditioning professional about modifying your ductwork. ■

This column was co-written by Pat Keegan and Brad Thiessen of Collaborative Efficiency. For more information on energy efficiency, visit www.collaborativeefficiency.com/energytips.



Burning wood produces radiant heat, which feels great if you're near the fire. But it can also send large amounts of room air up the chimney.

Photo by Stephane Juban



Washing dishes by hand typically uses more energy than the dishwasher.

Photo by Catt Liu



To ask a question, send an email to **Patrick Keegan** at energytips@collaborativeefficiency.com.
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