

CUT YOUR UTILITY BILLS



PHOTO BY MARK GILLILAND/PIONEER UTILITY RESOURCES

The Power of Energy Efficiency

Q: Do energy-saving measures in my home make a big difference?

A: For the average household, it depends on your home's efficiency and your habits. Your energy use is based on your home's equipment and how you use it.

You might already have an efficient home and good energy use habits, or you might have room for improvement.

Energy keeps us comfortable in our homes. Our monthly bills are the associated costs for this energy use. To make energy-saving measures work in your home, it comes down to preventing energy waste while maintaining personal comfort.

Let's take it back to the basics and see if we can find opportunities to save energy in your home. Filters, LEDs and thermostat settings are great places to start.

Filters. If your home has a forced-air system, you have a filter. The filter needs to be checked regularly and replaced when it is dirty. A dirty filter can cause heating and air-conditioning systems to use 15% more energy, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

Since heating and air conditioning make up almost half of your energy use, replacing your filter regularly or when it looks dirty is a habit that can reduce energy waste.

LEDs. Upgrading your lighting to LEDs

is a simple, low-cost way to cut energy use. Depending on your budget, you can do it all at once or change bulbs out over time. If you are going to replace a few at a time, prioritize the lights you use the most.

There are many LED options available. One major variation is color temperature, which is listed on the packaging in Kelvin. I recommend 2,700K because it is similar to incandescent lighting. I also suggest Energy Star-rated products because they meet strict quality and efficiency standards, use up to 90% less energy and last 15 times longer than standard incandescent bulbs.

Setting your thermostat. It's amazing how much difference a few degrees can make. By adjusting your thermostat to your home habits, you can save year-round on heating and cooling costs.

For winter months, the DOE recommends setting your thermostat to 68 F when you are home and dialing it back 8 to 10 degrees when you leave the house or go to sleep. For summer, the recommendation is 78 degrees when you are home and 8 to 10 degrees warmer when you are away.

Using a programmable or smart thermostat allows you to set the temperature according to your schedule.

Making these small changes in your routine helps improve your energy efficiency while maintaining comfort in your home. ■

The New Voice of Energy Efficiency

Hello! I'm Miranda Boutelle, director of operations and customer engagement at Efficiency Services Group. Our company partners with electric utilities to provide energy-efficiency services to members. I have dedicated my career to helping people improve their home's efficiency.



I fell in love with energy efficiency at a manufactured home in Wisconsin 20 years ago. I worked as a weatherization technician at a nonprofit that provided efficiency services to seniors, people with disabilities and income-eligible people. That's where I met Joan.

Joan worked at a factory making Christmas presents. She was rarely comfortable in her single-wide manufactured home during Wisconsin winters, and her energy bill was a large portion of her income. While working on her home, the HVAC crew found the ductwork was set up for a double-wide. There was a large hole underneath the furnace meant to heat a section of the home that did not exist. Joan was unknowingly heating the space under her home and the surrounding cornfields for years. Our crews sealed up the 12-inch hole and weatherized her home.

When we checked in a few months later, Joan welcomed us with open arms and snickerdoodles. Since we completed the work, she saved enough on her electric bill to buy Christmas presents for her grandchildren. Imagine that: a grandmother who works at a factory making Christmas presents who couldn't afford to buy them.

After that experience, I was hooked. Making that kind of difference in someone else's life changed my life. I look forward to sharing my energy-

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