Call, Act, Save: PSC Energy Conservation Awareness:
Home Energy *Conservation Ideas*

Call: Request a Free Home Energy Assessment (Home Energy Audit)

Wouldn't it be great to have an energy efficiency expert spend a couple of hours in your home and make specific recommendations for improving the efficiency of your particular property? In many cases you can! NorthWestern Energy customers should call 1.800.823.5995 to determine if their property is eligible for a home energy assessment; also known as a home energy audit. During the assessment, a technician will come to your home and examine your furnace, water heater, insulation, and make suggestions on upgraded appliances; weather stripping, caulking, or added insulation that would help conserve energy. Keep in mind that a free home energy audit is nothing like an IRS audit; none of the suggestions are required and the recommended changes are often times inexpensive and easy to do. Furthermore, there are many programs that can help you pay for the updates, and many conservation renovations have positive tax ramifications.

A Home Energy Audit is nothing like an IRS Audit.

If your property has already had an audit, making it ineligible for another, Northwestern Energy will go over the previous audit suggestions with you. The other utilities in the state do not currently offer energy audits. However, even if you are not a NorthWestern customer, you still may qualify for a free low-income home energy audit. Contact the Human Resource Development Agency in your area to see if you qualify; Click Here for a list. Some state programs Help Eligible Consumers pay for Conservation.

Act: Adjust Your Manual, or Install a Programmable, Thermostat

If you are away from your home for predictable periods of time, a programmable thermostat is an ideal way to save energy. If a new thermostat isn't in your future, you can still make the most of your manual thermostat by adjusting the temperatures daily before you leave the house and when you go to sleep at night. Typically, adjusting temperatures 5–8 degrees (down in winter, up in summer) can help save energy if you're going to be away from home for several hours.

Act: Change Your Furnace Filter Monthly

Dirty filters block air flow, making the furnace work harder; clean filters help your furnace operate more efficiently.

Act: Seal up Your Home

In addition to the usual culprits of windows and doorways, prime places for outside air to get into your home include gaps around dryer vents, outside faucets, and chimneys. Cracks in the foundation let air in too. A very small investment now in weather stripping and caulking can really pay off later in lower heating bills this winter. It's also a good idea to install insulated gaskets behind outlet covers and switch plates on exterior walls. During the warm weather is also a perfect time to replace broken windows and consider storm windows. Storm windows can reduce heat lost compared to single-paned windows by 25-50% in the winter. An alternative is covering windows with plastic to cut down on drafts. The dead air space between the window and the plastic will act as an insulating barrier and trap cold air before it gets into your home.

Act: Add or Replace Insulation

Heat rises and leaves your house through the attic, drawing cold air from outside through cracks and gaps in the lower level of your home. Increasing the insulation in your home's attic and crawl space can significantly reduce your energy consumption. Most homes with less than 6-7 inches of insulation can probably benefit by adding more.

Act: Close Rooms Not in Use

Shut the door and seal vents in non-occupied rooms.

Act: Seal and Insulate Ducts

Using duct sealant, such as mastic, or metal-backed tape to seal the seams and connections of ducts, first seal those that run through the attic, crawl space, unheated basement, or garage. Then wrap the ducts in insulation to keep them from getting hot in the summer or cold in the winter. Lastly, seal those ducts accessible in the living space of the house.

Act: Turn Down, Wrap, and Annually Drain your Water Heater

Usually more than 10 percent of a home energy bill is for heating water, so turning down the thermostat to accommodate your needs, which is usually closer to 120 degrees rather than the standard 140 degrees, can really help you save. An insulated wrap helps keep warmth in the tank. (Often times the installation of a hot water heater wrap is included in a home energy audit.) And, you'll extend your water heater's life and increase energy efficiency if you drain it annually to remove mineral build up and sediment.

Act: Install Water Saving Devices

You can reduce hot water usage with flow-restricting showerheads and sink aerators, which most consumers report do not affect water pressure.

Act: Minimize Hot Water Use and Don't Over Dry

Use the cold water setting when possible for washing laundry and the auto-dry feature on your dryer if you have it.

Act: Fill Appliances Before Use

Dishwashers, washing machines, and clothes dryers generally account for more than 12 percent of a home's energy bill and run the most energy efficient when full.

Act: Turn Off Items Not in Use

Turn off any energy consuming item, such as lamps, computers, or TVs, not being used. Activating the "sleep" function on electronic devices is also helpful, which power down the device if not in use after a certain period of time.

Act: Let the Sun Shine In

In the summer, keep window coverings closed to minimize solar heating of the house; in the winter, leave them open to let the sun help keep it warm.

Act: Close the Fireplace

Close the fireplace flue damper when not in use; a glass fireplace door will help stop heat from being lost also.

Act: Landscape Outside with Energy Efficiency in Mind

Windbreaks can reduce heat loss in the home; trees that lose their leaves in the fall give protection from the summer sun and permit winter sunlight to reach and warm your home.

Act: Install Compact Fluorescent Light Bulbs (CFLs)
Lighting accounts for 7 percent of most home energy bills; CFLs can reduce a light fixture's energy consumption by 75 percent.

Act: Compare Energy Efficiency Ratings and Annual Operating Costs
A slightly higher initial cost for a new high-efficiency appliance could pay off quickly through energy savings.

Call: Request "Budget" or "Balanced" Billing from Your Utility
While not an energy use reduction measure, budget or balanced billing can assist customers by evenly distributing the cost of heating their home throughout the year. Rather than paying low bills in the summer and very high bills in the colder months, these programs keeps customers' monthly bills predictable. For more information about budget billing, call Energy West at 1.406.791.7510, or NorthWestern Energy at 1.888.467.2669. The Montana-Dakota Utilities (MDU) program is called "balanced billing"; they can be reached at 1.800.638.3278.