

Energy Actions for Renters to Save Dollars and Increase Comfort

Developed by Shirley Niemeyer, Extension Housing and Environment Specialist
Marilyn J. Bruin, University of Minnesota Extension Service

The following tips are specifically designed to help tenants save energy with few out-of-pocket costs.

The energy used by each unit in an apartment complex may vary according to whether it is a corner unit or an inner apartment.

Corner units may provide more light through windows and cross ventilation, but northwest corner units also may be affected by cold winter winds. Units on upper floors may be warmer in the winter but hotter in the summer as heat rises. Shaded units may reduce summer air conditioning energy use. Inner units with two shared walls and with units above and below may be less affected by weather that impacts energy usage.

Before selecting an apartment, ask about the unit's utility rates and compare units in the complex if possible. Before implementing any measures requiring an alteration to your rental unit, such as caulking and weatherstripping, get your landlord's permission or ask your landlord about having it done.

Heating and Cooling

In the Winter

- Set thermostats no higher than 72°F when people are home. You can save about 1 to 3 percent on your heating bill for every degree that you lower the thermostat setting. For example, if you keep your thermostat set at 75°F all the time, and you lower it by three degrees to 72°F, you will save about 3 to 9 percent on your heating bill or about 9 cents for every dollar you spend on heating costs. Put on a sweater or warmer clothing for comfort and lower the thermostat even more.
- Lower the thermostat when you sleep. Lowering the thermostat from 72°F to 65°F at night, will save another 7 cents for every heating dollar you spend. Some people turn their thermostats down to 60° at night, when sleeping, or away to save even more energy.

- Never use the stove for additional heat — it is dangerous. Besides creating a fire hazard, fumes given off by gas ovens can result in increased carbon monoxide levels.
- If you have a furnace or heating system in your apartment with a thermostat, turn down the thermostat when it gets too warm. If your building is heated with a central boiler, close the radiator valves in the rooms that are too warm. The apartment manager may be able to adjust the boiler controls to lower your apartment temperature.
- Do not open your windows if it gets too hot. The furnace or heating system will pump out even more heat until the window is closed or the thermostat is turned down.
- On sunny days, open blinds, shades, and curtains, especially if your windows face south.
- At night, close the blinds, shades, and curtains to help keep heat in your apartment. Be sure all windows and doors (including storm windows and doors) are closed and locked. Locking increases their efficiency.
- If it is your responsibility to clean or replace furnace filters, add it to your home maintenance schedule. Dirty filters reduce the heating ability of the furnace or heating system and waste valuable fuel. Clean or replace the filter(s) as directed by the manager or landlord; do not try to clean disposable filters.

Contact the building manager or landlord immediately if the heating system is not keeping you warm or if you suspect a safety problem exists.

In the Summer

- During the day, keep window shades or blinds down and closed, especially on east and west facing windows. In the evening and early morning, open windows if the temperature and humidity are lower.

- Turn the air conditioning control to higher temperatures when no one is home for a period of about eight hours or more to reduce energy use.
- If you have a window air conditioner, place it in a window that is shaded or on the north side. This will help it perform more efficiently. Weather strip around the air conditioner.

Windows and Doors

- Close and lock all windows and doors. Close exterior sliding storm windows. Locking doors and windows creates a tighter seal and reduces air leaks.
- Use towels to block air coming in under doors or escaping to outside or buy a door sweep. If the door leaks around the entire frame, install weather stripping between the door and the frame.
- Use blinds, shades, and lined curtains or draperies to reduce heat loss in the winter and block heat gain during the summer. If your curtains or draperies aren't lined, use a sheet or purchase tightly woven heavier fabric. Create a casing on the top end and attach to a rod behind the window treatment.

Water

- If you have a separate water heater set at 140°F, turn the temperature down to 120°F (medium setting on a gas heater dial), and you'll cut your water-heating costs by 6 to 10 percent. For exceptionally soiled clothing, diapers, or when someone is ill, you may want to turn it back up when laundering those items.
- Turn the water heater down further if you leave for a trip.
- Front loading washers are usually more energy efficient than top loaders.
- Install low-flow faucets and shower heads and take shorter showers.
- Notify the building manager immediately if faucets leak. One drip can waste up to 48 gallons of water a week and waste energy used to heat water. Many landlords consider it a lease violation if tenants do not notify them of leaks.

Range and Oven

- Pans that fit a burner reduce heat lost. Use lids on pans.
- Use the broiler or microwave when possible. The broiler uses less energy, and does not need to be preheated.
- Use the kitchen exhaust fan when cooking to reduce moisture problems and pollutants.

- Don't use the oven to help heat your apartment. Besides creating a fire hazard, the fumes given off by gas ovens over an extended period of time can increase carbon monoxide levels.

Refrigerator

- Refrigerators cost \$5 to \$8 or more per month to operate, consuming 3 to 5 percent of your total energy use. Keep the refrigerator at 36°F to 38°F and the freezer at zero degrees.
- Check the gasket (soft plastic piece that seals the door to the body of the refrigerator) for gaps and improper fit. The door should close firmly against the gasket. Check the tightness of the door by placing a dollar bill between the gasket and the door. You should feel a slight drag when you pull it out.
- Do not locate an oven or heating appliance close to a refrigerator as the refrigerator will have to work harder to keep items cool. Do not put refrigerators in unairconditioned rooms such as garages or porches.
- Only open the door as long as necessary.
- Vacuum coils and keep drain trays clean.

Dishwasher

- Run the dishwasher only when it's full.
- Many dishwashers have energy-saving settings, such as a setting for partial loads (which use less hot water) or energy-efficient drying cycles.

Washer and Dryer

- Use hot water only for very dirty clothes and diapers, and if there is an illness in the family or someone who has a suppressed immune system. Refer to the washing instructions on the clothing labels and on the washing machine. Washing in hot water costs 20 to 40 cents per load. Wash in cold water using cold water detergents whenever possible.
- Adjust water levels for smaller loads. Full loads of laundry in the washer save both energy and water.
- Clean the lint from the dryer's filter after every load.
- Operate the dryer like the washer: don't overload it. Overloading uses excess energy because the items take longer to dry. Hang items to dry outside if possible.

Air Conditioner

- Air conditioners have an energy efficiency rating — EER for short. Buy an air conditioner with an EER of at least 10. Although air conditioners with EERs higher than 10 usually cost more, you will recapture this cost by using less electricity.

- Buy the correct size air conditioner for the square footage of your home. If the air conditioner is too large, it won't operate efficiently and it will use more energy.
- Remove and clean the filter every month or according to directions.
- If possible, put the air conditioner in a window that faces north or is shaded.
- Remove from the window and store the air conditioner during the winter or use a cover and weather stripping to stop air leaks.

Lighting

- Use screw-in compact fluorescent bulbs.
 - 1 standard incandescent bulb costs about \$4.80/year to operate.
 - 1 fluorescent bulb costs about \$1.20/year to operate.
 - 10 standard bulbs cost \$48.00/year to operate.
 - 10 fluorescent bulbs cost \$12.00/year to operate.
- Turn off lights when rooms are not occupied.

Small Appliances and Electronics

- Disconnect unnecessary or unused equipment.
- Shut off your computer, TV, and printer when not in use. Use a power strip to completely shut off the power supply to electronic equipment. Ready-on features, clocks, and other devices continue to use power even in the "off" position.



Look for the **ENERGYSTAR®** mark when buying electronics, appliances, and equipment.

- Unplug chargers when phones, computers, and other items are fully charged as chargers will continue to use electricity when plugged in.

Furniture and Bookcases

- Place bookcases, armoires, or large textile items on outside walls. Check behind the items occasionally as condensation can sometimes create mildew or mold behind furniture items.
- Do not place furniture and curtains over or around registers or in front of cold air returns as it blocks the air flow.

Ask Your Landlord About:

- Installing programmable thermostats.
- Installing awnings, window shades, or window films to block the summer sun.
- Sealing air leaks around windows and doors and adding storm windows and storm doors as needed.
- Sealing other air leaks.
- Fixing leaky faucets and toilets to conserve water.
- Replacing the shower head with a low-flow faucet.
- Responsibilities of the landlord and of you as the renter.

This publication has been peer reviewed.

Disclaimer

Reference to commercial products or trade names is made with the understanding that no discrimination is intended of those not mentioned and no endorsement by University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension is implied for those mentioned.

UNL Extension publications are available online at <http://extension.unl.edu/publications>.

**Index: Consumer Education
Energy Conservation**

Issued May 2009

Extension is a Division of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln cooperating with the Counties and the United States Department of Agriculture.

University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension educational programs abide with the nondiscrimination policies of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and the United States Department of Agriculture.

© 2009, The Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska on behalf of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension. All rights reserved.