



FUEL SAVING TIPS FOR THE HOME

One of the effects of Hurricane's Katrina and Rita will be significantly higher home heating costs this winter. Gas, oil and propane prices will all go up – by some reports as much as 30%. Electricity, because it is largely produced by gas and oil fired generating plants, is also expected to cost more. Even the wood used for heating some homes will be more expensive as homeowners place increased demands on cord wood supplies.

The following are some tips for conserving fuel this winter.

- Contact your gas or electric company. Most offer free or low cost home energy audits. A home heating expert will inspect your home and give you a detailed analysis of ways to save on heating costs. Some utility companies provide rebates if you follow through with their recommendations.
- Make sure your boiler or furnace is in good condition. Dirty or poorly adjusted heaters will increase your heating bills. Replace air filters monthly.
- Caulk and weatherstrip around windows and doors.
- Pull-down attic stairs, if un-insulated, will increase your heating costs. Buy or build an attic stair cover. It will seal air leaks and provide a surface upon which insulation can be placed.
- Fireplaces, even those with dampers, leak large amounts of air. Buy an inexpensive fireplace draft stopper. This is an inflatable pillow that is placed below the fireplace damper that effectively seals the chimney. Don't forget to take it out before you light a fire!
- Turn down the thermostat at night or when you will be away from home during the day. Programmable thermostats will do this automatically.
- To save on water heating costs, keep your water heated to the lowest temperature possible, use cold water to wash clothing that can be washed in this manner, keep showers as short as possible, install low flow shower heads, and, if your water heater is in an unheated area, wrap it with insulation.
- Don't heat areas of the house that you do not regularly occupy.
- Catch as much solar energy as possible by opening the blinds on sunny southern exposure windows during the day, then closing them at night to hold the heat in.
- Tax credits are available for those who install alternative energy systems like solar hot water heating systems. With the increased cost of fuel, these systems will pay you back in savings over a shorter period of time. Similarly, such initiatives as installing increased insulation and energy saving windows can make more economic sense now that energy costs have risen.

Low and moderate-income households are eligible for heating fuel assistance grants. Contact the National Energy Assistance Referral (NEAR) project at its toll free number (1-866-674-6327) or on the web at: <http://www.liheap.ncat.org/referral.htm>. This clearinghouse maintains a list of state administered Low Income Home Energy Assistance Programs.