

ClimateSmart

Efficiency for Renters



“Rental housing dwellers often find themselves stuck in energy consumption no man’s land. Landlords generally don’t pay energy bills, so they have no incentive to make efficiency upgrades. Renters may not be there long enough to recoup efficiency investments in energy bill savings, so they get stuck paying high bills for drafty, uncomfortable homes. The good news is, renters don’t have to be doomed to high energy bills and discomfort. There are plenty of low-cost, do-it-yourself energy upgrades and simple habits that can lower rental housing energy bills, making your home more comfortable and reducing your environmental impact.”

ELECTRICAL EFFICIENCY

Electricity is used by appliances such as dishwashers, electronics, air conditioning and anything else that’s plugged into the wall. Since about two-thirds of Colorado’s electricity comes from burning coal, efforts to reduce electricity consumption can have a big impact on air quality and greenhouse gas emissions as well as your utility bill. Here are some low- and no-cost tips to help reduce your electricity consumption.

- **Keep the sun’s heat out** in the summer to reduce the air conditioning load. Light-colored insulated window shades or drapes reflect summer sun while still letting light in. Keep the shades drawn during the hottest part of the day. Turn the A/C off at night and open the windows to let the breeze cool your home naturally.
- **Use ceiling or portable fans** to provide additional cooling and help air circulation to cut down on air conditioning costs. Fans use less electricity than AC.
- **Turn off your lights** when you aren’t in the room and consider using Compact Fluorescent Lightbulbs (CFLs). These light bulbs only cost about \$2 each, use a quarter of the energy of incandescent bulbs and last up to 10 years! And, you can take them with you when you move.
- **Avoid halogen bulb torchiere lamps.** They are inexpensive to buy but expensive to operate. They also produce excess heat and are a fire hazard.
- **Keep refrigerator coils and vents clean.** Vacuum dust from coils behind the fridge and from the vent under the door every couple of months.

- **Switch your computer to sleep mode** when it’s not used for five minutes. If you plan to be away from the computer for more than 30 minutes, turn it off. This does not damage the computer.
- **Use the energy saving settings** on the refrigerator (or make sure the temperature is set at 35 to 38 degrees in the fridge and zero in the freezer), dishwashers, washing machines and clothes dryers.
- **Check the fridge for leaky gaskets.** If you feel cold air around the closed door or if moisture collects around the door, you’re losing energy. Ask your landlord to replace the gasket.
- **Unplug small appliances** that aren’t being used, such as cell phone and iPod chargers. Plug computer equipment and entertainment systems into a power strip with an on/off switch. Cutting off power from the strip when not in use eliminates the draw from these energy “vampires.”

NATURAL GAS EFFICIENCY

Natural gas use has a lower environmental impact than electricity, but the cost is much higher. In Colorado, most home and hot water heating relies on natural gas. Here are a few inexpensive tips to lower your gas costs and improve the comfort of the home.

- **Check for air leaks.** In an average home, energy loss from air leaks around doors, windows and other areas can be equal to leaving a window open. Look for places that feel drafty and check for gaps or cracks around windows, doors, chimneys, and utility cut-throughs for pipes, ducts and electrical outlets. Seal leaks with caulk and weather-stripping. Install door sweeps on doors and gaskets behind electrical outlets.

- **Install an Energy Star® programmable thermostat** or ask your landlord for one. Keep it set at 58°F at night and when you're away and 68°F when you're home. Every degree above 70 costs an additional 3% to 4% on heating bills.
- **Install low-flow shower heads and faucet restrictors** and take short showers. Hot water heaters are often one of the most expensive energy uses in a home. A low flow shower head only costs a few dollars and can save a family as much as \$70 a year.
- **Insulate your hot water heater** and set it at 120 degrees. If the hot water tank is not insulated, pick up an insulating blanket at any hardware store. It's easy to install and will pay for itself in less than a year.
- **Keep areas around heat vents clear** of drapes and furniture so that they do not block the flow of air.
- If frost or water condensation appears on your windows or they feel drafty, **install clear plastic sheeting** on the inside of the window frame. You can weatherize your windows for about \$3 each and your home will feel more comfortable.
- **Open window blinds during the day** in winter to take advantage of the sun's heat, especially on the south and east sides of the home.

TALK TO YOUR LANDLORD

The best time to pay attention to energy efficiency is before moving in.

- Ask the landlord about the efficiency and maintenance of the home, including insulation, furnace, air conditioner, water heater and appliances.
- Ask to see a few months' previous energy bills. Try to choose an apartment or house with low energy bills.
- Before you move in, request caulking around the windows and outlet covers, weather stripping around doors and a programmable thermostat.
- Point out to the landlord that improving energy efficiency can help increase the property's value and make it a desirable to potential tenants.
- Ask your landlord to invest in a reduced-cost energy audit through the REAP program. Call 303-441-3278 x24

