



COLD CLIMATE HOUSING RESEARCH CENTER

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## ENERGY FOCUS

**What you can do for under \$100 to lower your energy costs.**

**By Karl Monetti**

Have you noticed the "fuel surcharge" on your electric bill lately? I am sure you have. Have you also noticed, and read, the little colored inserts in your electric bill each month? My first tip is to not complain about the surcharge without first taking the advice of those flyers. Almost every month GVEA gives us helpful hints on how to lower our electric bill. Here are just a few:

1. Contact GVEA online or on the phone (452-1151) and schedule a Home Sense audit. For a nominal fee GVEA will send out a technician to evaluate your home's energy consumption and show you ways to save energy with very little, if any, money.
2. Change out your incandescent light bulbs with compact florescent light bulbs(CFLs). CFLs cost more to buy, but they use 1/4 the energy of an incandescent bulb, last ten times as long, and over their lifetime will save you many times the cost of the bulbs in lower electric bills.
3. Unplug all unused electric appliances when not in use. It is estimated 7-10% of the average home electric usage is in the "phantom" power used to keep these appliances in a standby mode. If we plug all our TV,VCR, DVD player cords into a power strip we can turn them off after use.
4. According to Jim Lee of Interior Weatherization, the biggest bang for the buck as far as energy savings goes is to install a low flow shower head. For a cost of \$30-50 and ten minutes to install, you can save several times the cost each year in lowered electric costs. If your hot water heater is on your furnace, it will save you fuel.
5. Wrap your hot water heater with an insulating blanket to keep the heat in the tank.
6. Take shorter showers.
7. Turn the hot water heater temperature down from the factory pre-set (usually 140 degrees) to 120 degrees.

Now to a building's heating costs. As with any other form of energy, the cheapest unit of energy is the one not used, so the trick as always, is first to use less.

1. Use the same tips for hot water heaters above if your hot water comes from the boiler.
2. Turn the thermostat down one or two degrees, summer and winter.
3. Install an automatic set-back thermostat that regulates heat output during different times of the day. If you not in the building during different times of the day you can set it so the temperature automatically turns down. This is especially helpful in businesses, where nobody is in the building for 12-16 hours a day.

4. Weather stripping and caulking are inexpensive and easy to apply and should be one of the first items to consider when deciding what to do to increase the energy efficiency of your home. Good advice can be had from the folks who sell them.

You can find more tips on the GVEA site, [www.gvea.com](http://www.gvea.com)

**Karl Monetti is a retired North Pole veterinarian. He recently served on the Interior Issues Council and is helping to organize the energy savings retrofit of the Northern Alaska Environmental Center.**