



COLD CLIMATE HOUSING RESEARCH CENTER

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ENERGY FOCUS

Give Energy-Efficient Gifts, Save Money, Show the Love

By Adam Wasch, Energy Outreach Consultant for CCHRC and CES

When I was a kid, Christmas stockings were a leading indicator of what kind of gifts might be waiting under the Christmas tree. Candy? Probably a lean year for mom and dad. Matchbox cars? Might be a whole racetrack set wrapped in one of those boxes. For many families, this year's holidays will be tight. The upside to this otherwise austere forecast is that energy-saving stocking stuffers are a fun way to save money – without being a (major) Grinch.

Caulk/Spray Foam – No, I'm not joking, nor am I confused about what's fun. Chances are if your home is like most Alaskans' the floor under your Christmas tree is drafty. Winter is not the time to be pulling off cladding and re-insulating your walls, but some wisely applied caulk or expanding spray foam can stop a lot of air leaks. Cheaper than quality wool socks, too.

"Smart" Power Strip – Many electronics today, such as TVs and computers, consume energy even if they're switched off. Cut off these "stand-by" drains on your budget by using a power strip that automatically senses when electronics go to sleep and turns them off completely.

Clothespins – I hear that when the power lines to Juneau were knocked out earlier this year that clothespins were in high demand. Clothes dryers consume an enormous amount of energy when very often you can simply hang clothes to dry. Fairbanks's dry climate is perfect for fast drying – drying indoors is fine as long as you have adequate ventilation.

Kilowatt Monitor – Into guilt this holiday season? These handy gadgets plug in between your wall socket and appliance to tell you how much electricity the appliance consumes. For every kilowatt hour consumed, between one and two pounds of carbon dioxide are produced. How much carbon dioxide is "American Idol" worth to you?

Compact Fluorescent Bulbs (CFLs) – These save lots of electricity and last almost as long as Gilligan's Island reruns.

LED Christmas Lights – Is the holiday season really the same if you're not spending hours locating burnt-out bulbs on your holiday lights or, at least, replacing them? LEDs, which promise more and more household uses, have no filament to burn out and use exceptionally little electricity. Plus, they're trendy.

Rechargeable Batteries/Charger – If you’re not using these already, you might not appreciate how far the world of rechargeable batteries has come in terms of convenience and power. Lots of things use batteries, why not recycle their use?

Solar- or Wind-Powered Cell Phone/Media Player/Computer Charger – Maybe not so great this time of year, but wonderful in the summer for your hiking, boating, and bicycling friends.

Nothing – When asked, CCHRC’s Product Testing Director Colin Craven says the best gifts are immaterial and needn’t cost money. “I recommend nothing,” said Craven. “Love is the best gift of all and inherently energy-efficient.”

Low-Flow Shower Head – A water-conserving shower head saves water and water-heating expenses. Plus, some have little jets that feel like a mini massage.

Electric Timers – These nifty things have a wide range of energy-conserving uses. Perhaps the biggest savings is possible by controlling when the electricity to your car plug-in is turned on in the winter. Depending on the temperature and the size of your vehicle, engine block heaters can do their job in three to four hours. Set a timer to turn on the power for the hours immediately before you leave your home in the morning. Temperature-sensing switches for your engine heaters are also available

Light Timers/Motion Sensors – Conserve electricity by putting your household lights on timers or install motion detectors, which are great for outdoor lights and reducing light pollution.

Help Someone Get An Energy Rating – Hundreds of dollars leak out of our under-insulated homes and through our inefficient appliances and heating systems. The Alaska Housing Finance Corporation’s (AHFC) Weatherization Program will provide thousands of dollars for improvements, but first homeowners must front \$325 for an energy rating. AHFC later reimburses this \$325, but having to dish it out up front is enough to stop some from requesting a rating. Why not pay for someone’s rating (and tactfully make them promise to give you the money back)? Call the PORTAL (Portal On Retrofits Training And Loans) at 455-4328 for more information.

Adam Wasch promotes energy awareness for the Cooperative Extension Service (CES) and the Cold Climate Housing Research Center (CCHRC). For questions or comments please contact CCHRC at (907) 457-3454