



Managing your electric bill

by Todd Hoener, GVEA Energy Efficiency Specialist

Of all your expenses, probably the toughest to manage is the electric bill, partly because you don't pay for it upfront. If you don't have the money for gas, you might walk. If you can't pay for heating fuel, you might burn wood instead. However, with electricity, you use it today and pay for it later. This time lag can become a problem if money is tight and you're not carefully managing your daily electric use.

However, you can utilize your electric meter and your bill to help you manage electric use and budget. Your meter and your bill are your friends, not foes. With electricity, you buy kilowatt-hours (kWh). The function of electric meters is to record the kWh of electric use between billing periods (about 30 days).

1. With a pencil, logbook, calendar, and watch, you can begin tracking the reads on your meter. Each day, at about the same time, log the date, time, kWh, and what activities took place in the last 24 hours (such as laundry, holiday baking, turned on an electric heater).
2. Subtract today's meter read from tomorrow's read and log the kWh difference.
3. Audit what devices are using electricity in the house. Take notice of the outlets. Record what devices are connected. Examine the circuit breaker (or fuse) panel and note which breakers control which circuits (there may be a dedicated circuit for a single, high-load device like a water heater).

After several weeks of logging use and activities, you should notice a pattern in the daily kWh use. First, you'll discover a kWh number you never drop below. That's the baseload. It's all those devices that are always on or used like the refrigerator or standby power. Second, there are high-use days when either high-use devices were used (like an electric heater) or uncontrolled activities (like leaving the lights on).

Use your electric bill to compare your past use with your daily log. GVEA bills post the average daily kWh use for the past 12 billing periods. To lower your use, you need to either use more efficient devices (for example, compact fluorescent lamps) and/or change your behavior to more carefully manage your use. Currently, to budget for an electric bill that is about \$100, you'll need to use, on average, no more than 17 kWh per day over 30 days.

In closing, you should develop your own Household Energy Policy. GVEA's home energy audit program, HomeSense, can help you create a policy today. Knowledge is power. Turn it on. It's free.

Ask a Builder articles promote awareness of home-related issues. If you have a question, contact the Cold Climate Housing Research Center at info@cchrc.org or 907.457.3454.