

Fall efficiency steps

There's still time for energy efficiency tax credits

Take advantage of tax credits expiring Dec. 31

You've got several months yet to make qualifying energy-efficiency improvements to your home before federal tax credits expire Dec. 31, 2011. To apply for the efficiency credits, use tax form 5695.

Qualifying details are important, so go to www.energysavers.gov/financial/70010.html#products_2011 or to the Internal Revenue Service site. Note that on many of the items below, the manufacturer should offer written documentation that the item qualifies for a tax credit.

Here's a summary of what qualifies for 2011 tax credits:

Biomass stoves – Up to \$300, including labor, for stoves with a thermal efficiency of at least 75 percent. Biomass stoves may burn agricultural crops, wood, wood waste and residues (including pellets), plants, grasses, algae — anything qualifying as biomass.

Heating, ventilation and air conditioning – Central air, both split and package systems, \$300; electric heat pumps, \$300; furnaces and boilers, \$150; advanced main air circulating fan, \$50. Includes installation costs.

Insulation – Up to \$500 for insulation designed to improve efficiency. Must meet 2009 International Energy Conservation Code requirements. Does not include installation costs.

Roofing – Up to \$500, for all Energy Star-qualifying metal or reflective asphalt shingles. Does not include installation costs.

Non-solar water heater – Up to \$300 for heaters with energy factor of .82 or thermal efficiency of at least 90 percent. Includes installation costs. All Energy Star gas tankless heaters qualify, but most storage tank heaters and all electric storage tanks or tankless heaters do not qualify. Electric heat pump water heaters with an energy factor of 2 do qualify.

Windows, doors, skylights – 10 percent of cost up to \$500 for doors and skylights; windows capped at \$200. Does not include installation costs.

Though these are not large dollar amounts, every little bit helps.

Note that big-ticket improvements for geothermal heat pumps, solar energy systems and wind energy systems have a 30 percent federal tax credit with no upper limit through December 31, 2016.

Save energy this fall without spending a dime

Here are a few changes you can make this fall to save energy dollars without making any financial investment:

Turn off the AC – Even if heat lingers into the fall months, it won't be as intense as in the summer. So shut off the air conditioner, open up the windows on opposite sides of your house for cross-ventilation and cool down with a fan.



Reflect radiator heat – If you have radiators in your house, place a sheet of aluminum foil between the radiator and the wall to push heat into the room.

Bleed radiator – Before turning on the heat, bleed the radiator of air trapped in the coils to improve efficiency.

Rebalance heat registers – If you have a forced-air system, redirect the air flow from summertime (higher in the house) to wintertime (lower in the house).

Change furnace filter – At least once a month during the heating season, change the filter. Dirty filters can overwork your furnace.

Clean out registers, radiators and heating vents – Remove dust and dirt *before* cold weather hits.

Readjust thermostat – For the heating mode, set it no higher than 68 degrees during the day and 55 degrees at night or when you're away for an extended period. For heat pumps, adjust downward by no more than 5 degrees to avoid activating the backup strip heating unnecessarily.

Check your fireplace – Clean it to remove built-up creosote. Make sure the damper is tightly sealed when not using the fireplace. Fireplace combinations of soot, tar, or wood sap moisture known as creosote can be a fire hazard.

Get ready for old-man winter this fall

Fall's welcome cooler temperatures from summer make it a good season to make energy-efficiency improvements to your home. And, those milder temperatures will be easier to work in than waiting until it's freezing outside.

Here are some fall energy-saving projects:

Plant a tree – This summer was *not* a good time to plant a shade tree. But October and November are ideal for planting. The trees, when properly positioned and mature, can save up to 25 percent on heating and cooling combined, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. DOE also says trees can reduce your *cooling* bills by 50 percent. Plant shade trees on the east, west and southwest corners of your house for the greatest benefit.

Insulate – Only 20 percent of homes built before 1980 are well-insulated, according to DOE. Add insulation to R-30 or greater in your attic, and be sure to seal/insulate the access door. Ceilings above unheated basements or crawlspaces should be insulated to R-20, walls to R-20 and floors to R-19.

Weatherstrip, caulk and seal – According to DOE, up to 30 percent of conditioned air can be wasted through leaks and drafts. Replace old weatherstripping and caulk, and add gaskets behind electrical outlets on exterior walls. In the attic, open wall tops, chimneys, furnace flues and duct, plumbing or electrical runs can leak lots of energy. Seal them

with spray foam or rigid foam board. Cracks around windows also can waste conditioned air: a 1/16th-inch unsealed crack around a window lets in as much cold air as a window left open 1/2 inch.

Install storm doors and windows – Did you know that installing a storm panel over single-pane glass can save up to 50 percent in energy use, according to DOE? If you can't afford storm doors and windows, plastic sheeting will do the trick for only a few dollars.

Wrap water heater and pipes – Heating water in an average home accounts for 16 percent of total energy costs, according to DOE. Insulating a conventional water heater tank to at least R-24 can reduce standby heat losses by up to 45 percent. Wrapping pipes can reduce heat loss and can raise water temperatures 2 degrees to 4 degrees hotter than uninsulated pipes. This allows you to lower the setting on the heater to at least 120 degrees. For every 10-degree drop in water temperature, you can save between 3 percent and 5 percent in energy costs.

Install a programmable thermostat – These affordable devices make it easy to set your heating and cooling on "cruise control." The thermostat can be set to drop a few degrees when you go to bed and leave for work and crank up when you get ready for work and return home. For every degree adjusted, you can save 1 percent to 3 percent on heating costs, depending on your heating source. Typically, you'll get your money back in a year.

Sign up for an energy audit

There's no better time for a home energy audit than the fall. The timing gives you a chance to make some changes before winter hits or to develop a plan for the new year.

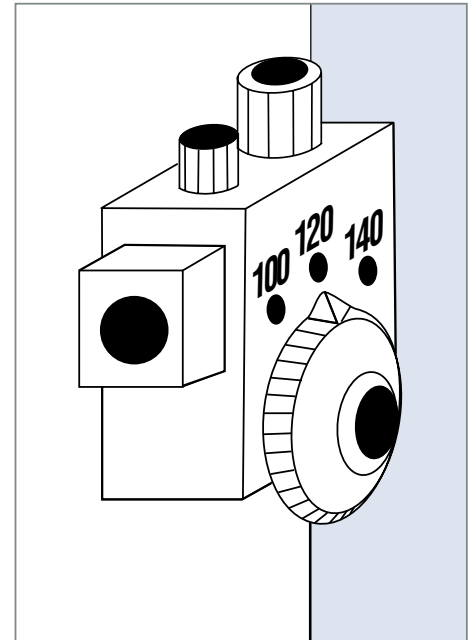
Where do you find an auditor? Start with your electric cooperative, which may provide that service or can recommend a reliable, affordable contractor.

You also can get a good sense of how your home compares in its energy use to others of similar size by using online calculators. Touchstone Energy at <http://www.touchstoneenergy.com/efficiency/residentialenergyaudit/Pages/tserea/default.html> is one source. Energy Star at www.energystar.gov is another.





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thermostat.jpg



Energy Efficiency
Tip of the Month

Insulating windows with draperies is a low-cost quick fix for drafty windows. This treatment helps you year-round, blocking sunlight in the summer and holding in heat during the winter months.

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Doug Rye says . . .

Insulation for retirement

We just had one of the hottest summers on record and we received our highest electric bill ever.

However, our house was built to the Doug Rye energy standards so the bill was far less than other houses of comparable size. As is the case during most cold winters and hot summers, I am receiving many calls from families who are having difficulty paying their utility bills. My heart goes out to those who have to make decisions between buying food and medicine or paying the utility bill. I wish that I had a magic wand to help you, but, of course, I don't. All I can do is to continue to give energy tips that will help you.



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I recently received a call from a fellow at a lending institution in Missouri who listens to my weekly radio program. He said that they have a program on investments that follows my show on three radio stations. He thought that they might use some of my energy ideas in their work. I asked several questions and learned that they also loaned money and had actually made a few energy-efficiency mortgages (EEM). This really got my attention because I had worked on a plan like this many years ago. An EEM allows additional money to be loaned if the money is used to make the house meet certain energy standards. We both agreed that energy efficiency improvements are great investments.

I couldn't get these thoughts out of my mind. I'll bet that surprises you, doesn't it? Well, there is a really good program that follows our show on radio station KABZ 103.7 in Little Rock. It is called, "Planning for the Future" and is hosted by "John and Janet." They have really good ideas for planning your future. I have heard them say that one of the biggest concerns folks have is that they will outlive their income, even though they had planned for some retirement. Because I have been teaching that energy efficiency is a great investment for 25 years, I discussed some ideas with them.

Here is the simple version of our discussion. Would you give me \$3,000 one time if I would give you \$50 per month for the rest of your life? I want you folks to answer that question. Some of you would say that you don't have \$3,000. Others might just say "no." The rest of you would say, "maybe, tell me more."

Okay, if you kept your \$3,000 in a savings or CD account at 2 percent interest, you would have about \$3,656 at the end of 10 years. If I gave you \$50 per month for 10 years you would

have \$6,000. You would have gotten your \$3,000 back, made \$2,344, and continued to receive \$50 each and every month.

Okay, what's the catch? Many of you know where I'm going with this. I believe that there are millions of houses in this country that \$3,000 worth of energy improvements could save \$50 per month on the utility bill and the house would also be more comfortable. Let me sweeten the pot for more incentive. Suppose I increase the \$50 per month figure by the same amount that utility rates increase. The Kiplinger Letter dated June 4, 2010, states that electric rates could increase as much as 10 percent a year in the coming years. Let's just use 7 percent. If that happens in 10 years, you will have gotten your \$3,000 back, made \$4,631, and received \$92 each month thereafter.

Well, you get the point but I have one more question for you. What if you don't do anything? In 10 years it will be too late to call me. But regardless, I will still care and worry about you. See you next month when winter will be right around the corner.

Doug Rye, a licensed architect living in Saline County, Ark., and the popular host of the "Home Remedies" radio show, works as a consultant for the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas to promote energy efficiency to cooperative members statewide. To order Doug's video or ask energy efficiency-related questions, call Doug at 1-501-653-7931. More energy-efficiency tips, as well as Doug's columns, can also be found at www.ecark.org.



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