Transition Cambridge Energy Group

Energy saving tips

Here are some tips for energy saving around the home.
For more information see advice at www.transitioncambridge.org/energy

Temperature Control

The warmer your home is, the more heat it loses, so try not to heat it more than you need to be comfortable. Here are some tips.

Turn down the thermostat a degree or two

Turning down the thermostat by just 1C could save you 8% on the space heating part of your bill. However, different people need different temperatures. To start with drop it a tiny bit - just half a degree - and see how you feel. Put on a woolly and make sure you move about and do something every now and again. If you feel cold at first, persevere for a week or two. If you are comfortable then try lowering the temperature a little more.

Set the timer to turn the heating off 30 minutes before you go to bed

Your home probably takes an hour or so to cool down after the heating goes off so you should be able to turn the heating off half an hour before you go to bed without any discomfort. If you normally heat for 8 hours in the day, you have just saved about 5%.

Turn down the radiators in less used rooms

If you have thermostatic radiator valves (TRVs) you can twiddle them up and down according to need. If you have a spare room, turning that one down could save you 4% on space heating, or 8% of the room has two outside walls and you don’t have wall insulation.

Heat one room only

If you mainly occupy one room only you could turn the central heating right down and use an alternative form of heating (if available) for that room. However, be aware that modern gas central heating is very efficient so if you use a gas fire with an open flue instead it will use up to three times as much gas for the same heating effect – the rest goes up the chimney. If your gas fire has a balanced flue then this is not such a problem. An electric fire keeps all the heat in the room but electricity is more expensive than gas or oil.

Other ideas:

• Move the thermostat out of the hall because in there it will get a cold draught every time you open the front door which will often trigger the boiler unnecessarily.
• A wireless thermostat you can take with you between rooms, especially useful if your fixed thermostat is in the hall which you don’t want to heat anyway.
• Heat yourself, not the room. For example you could try a heated pad for your feet.

Reducing heat loss

Keep curtains behind radiators

Many homes have radiators under windows but when you close the curtains you want the radiators to heat in front of them, not behind. So tuck the curtains behind the radiator. Better still, extend the window sill above the radiator to guide the rising warm air into the room and away from the glass.

Secondary glazing film

Double glazing and glass secondary glazing is expensive. Secondary glazing film is a cheap alternative. This solution is good for windows that you don’t need to open.

Close up chimneys with open flues

If your chimney has an open flue, it is very likely the biggest heat loss in the room. Some chimneys have a flap you can close to control the air flow – so keep it closed when you aren’t running a fire. Otherwise, use a chimney balloon or just a bag stuffed with newspaper.

Foil behind radiators on outside walls

You want the heat from your radiator to go into the room, not into the wall and outside. With a thermal camera it is often possible to see warm patches under windows from radiators. So fit a reflective panel on the wall behind the radiator.

For more information go to http://www.transitioncambridge.org/energy and look for Energy Saving Tips.
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Improving heating efficiency

Get an A-rated boiler
If you have a gas boiler and radiators, make sure it is an efficient A-rated boiler. Also, make sure the temperature settings are appropriate – see our website for more advice on this.

Check your radiators
Make sure your radiators are working properly. If they are cold at the top you probably have an airlock and they need bleeding; if they are cold at the bottom they may be blocked with scale or sludge.

Don't hide your radiators
Radiators need good air flow around them to transfer their heat into the room. Placing a sofa in front blocks the heat in (and isn't good for the sofa either).

Hot water savings

Wrap up your hot water tank and pipes.
If you have a hot water tank then it is constantly losing heat. That may not be such a bad thing - it might make your bathroom cosy - but if it isn't where you want heat then it is a waste. So make sure it is well insulated. Modern tanks have built in insulation but older copper tanks should have a thick insulating jacket; if haven't got a proper jacket for it, wrapping it up in a old quilt is a great deal better than nothing. It is also important to insulate the pipes between the tank and the boiler. These run very hot to warm the tank so can lose a lot of heat. Also, if you don't have a thermostat on the tank then your boiler will be checking the temperature of the returning water to see if your tank is up to heat. If your pipes aren't lagged and they are losing a lot of heat then the boiler will think your tank is not hot enough. It is easy to fit foam insulation around the pipes, provided you can get to them.

Aerating shower heads and timers
Do you need a tropical rain storm or will a shower do? Fitting an aerating shower head can make a shower feel more like a deluge. Also, shorter showers use less water. Use a timer to remind you how long you are taking.

Wash up less often
How long do you have to wait before the kitchen tap runs hot? This is water that has been sitting in the pipes. It was hot once but has gone cold. Every time you wait for the tap to run hot you are wasting heat. So wash up once a day, not every time you use a plate.

Avoid using cold hot water
When you run the hot tap and it runs cold to start with, do you wait for it to get hot? If you aren't going to wait, why not just use cold instead? Every time you run the hot tap you are draining hot water from your cylinder. Or if you have a combi boiler, running the hot tap turns the boiler on, using a certain amount of fuel however little water you use.

Saving on appliances
(All cost calculation are based on 14p/kWh)

Let the sun dry your washing
If you have a garden and the sun is shining, use a washing line and dry your clothes for free! On average a tumble dryer run costs 17p.

Fit LED light bulbs
LEDs are more expensive than CFLs but will still pay for themselves in time. A 10W LED will have similar output to a 20W CFL. They are better than CFLs:
  • To replace halogens (where CFLs don't fit).
  • For use with dimmer switches because CFLs are not very efficient when used with dimmers
  • Outdoors (CFLs do not work well when cold)
  • For lights you use a lot, because the savings are then greater.

Turn the TV off when no-one is watching
An average LCD TV could use 100W. If you turn it off when you aren't watching it and that is 1 hour per day you save £5 in the year.

Buying a new appliance? Check the energy label
Many electrical appliances now need energy labels giving their energy rating and estimated annual energy consumption (kWh). When you look at the label remember that 'A' is not necessarily the best rating; for some appliances you can now get up to A+++ . In any case the estimated annual kWh is much more useful than the energy rating because the rating only says how the appliance compares with similar ones. Larger appliances and ones with more features can use more electricity for the same rating. So only buy the size you need and don't go for fancy features that use more energy unless you are really likely to need them.

Boil just the water you need
It takes a surprising amount of energy to heat water so don't overfill the kettle – this saves time too!