



The Daily Gleaner

You've got the POWER - lower your energy use and save money!

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Fall is here and winter will soon be upon us, and this means heating bills! In Canada, roughly 55 percent of home energy use is for heat, and the other 45 percent is for hot water, appliances and lighting. Over 30 percent of homes in New Brunswick were built before 1960 and these older homes generally have less insulation than newer homes, and likely have more air leaks around windows, doors and rim joists (the piece of wood at the end of the first floor joists in the basement).

If you live in one of these older homes, or even if your home is new, there are a number of actions you can take to lower your heating costs. These actions range from free to costly, but let's start with the 'free'!

Turning down the heat in your home by a couple of degrees can help reduce your heating bill by up to 10 percent. It really is that simple! There is no need to wear a t-shirt in your home in the middle of January, why not put on a sweater and slippers, and change the temperature from 21°C to 18°C? You will save money and lower your greenhouse gas emissions.

I have noticed that some homeowners and small business owners have window-insert air conditioning units that stay in place year-round (when they are really meant to be removed after the summer months). I know it can be a nuisance to install and remove it each year, but I can assure you, the savings from not letting hot air escape from your house through the leaky window around the unit is worth it.

Checking for air leaks in your home is free, but fixing them may cost a few dollars. However, sealing leaks with caulking or weatherstripping is a very inexpensive and effective way to lower your energy use. One of the simplest ways to check for leaks is to use incense sticks. Wait for a windy day and take the burning stick around all potential leaks in your home, such as windows, doors, fireplaces, vents and especially the rim joist in the basement if you can access it. If the smoke blows horizontally, you have a leak. Make note of the leak and how you can best seal it, or even take a few digital photographs to the hardware store to find out what is the best type of sealant or weatherstripping use for specific leaks. Taking a few hours to do this could potentially save you a few hundred dollars this winter.

If you are looking to spend a bit more money on making your home more efficient - it could almost always use more insulation, especially in the attic and basement. Typical attics should have at least R-40 insulation (the measure of insulation); and attics in R-2000 homes (very energy efficient) are typically in the R-50 to R-60 range.

Another way to lower your heating costs is to upgrade to a more energy efficient heating system, such as a heat pump or a newer furnace. However, I highly recommend that you improve the insulation and seal the leaks around your home before installing a more efficient heating source because the better insulated your home is, the less energy you will need to heat it.

Efficiency New Brunswick offers grants of up to \$2,000 or interest free loans up to \$10,000 for people who make energy efficient upgrades to their homes. Visit www.energycnb.ca for more information.

It is human nature to ignore or avoid many small home repair jobs that should be done but aren't an emergency - such as a post that needs to be painted or a rain gutter that needs to be cleaned. We often need prompts to get these things done. I hope this column is a prompt for you to take some energy-saving actions around your home this fall and winter. If you do, you will reduce your energy costs and your carbon footprint – guaranteed!

Peter Corbyn is the founder of www.earthinstitute.ca and www.greenenergychallenge.com.