

Good News About Winter Energy Costs – Really!

Yes, it's true. The U.S. Energy Information Administration released its annual winter outlook in mid October and based its prediction on the anticipation of a mild winter coupled with lower fuel costs. The agency says that regardless of the type of fuel used, heating costs are expected to take less of a bite out of your budget in the coming months by an average of about 8%. The nearly 58 million households that use natural gas stand to save about \$105 compared with last year and propane users will get an even bigger break – as much as \$280. More modest reductions of \$20 to \$60 are expected for people who use electricity or fuel oil to heat their homes.

In addition, a few minor lifestyle adjustments can drive energy costs even lower. These include:

- **Unplugging** your TV, DVD player and microwave ovens when not in use can lower electricity costs by about 3% according to *National Grid*. This is because these and other devices actually consume “phantom” energy even when you’re not using them, especially when you are away from home.



- **Adjusting** your thermostat just three degrees higher in the summer and three degrees lower in the winter reduces your energy demand by

almost 10% per day. *National Grid* recommends adjusting your thermostat when your home is unoccupied. Contrary to popular belief, the fuel required to bring your home back to a comfortable temperature when you return is more than offset by the savings when you are away.

- **Switching** to low-flow showerheads can save as much as \$265 per year on water bills and low-flow toilets can save \$90, according to *Consumers Union*.
- **Purchasing** Energy Star certified appliances will not only save money via increased efficiency, but may also qualify you for state rebates that could reach \$200 per appliance, *Consumers Union* reports.
- **Using** your EAP *Information Resources* component can potentially save you hundreds of dollars. Log on to www.theEAP.com, select Employee & Family Login and sign in (click ‘register here’ if this is your first visit). Then go to Tools for Tough Times and scroll down to Heating & Home Energy. There you will find:
 - State by state incentives and rebates for energy efficiency
 - A listing of 60 Energy Star qualified product categories of appliances, heating and energy units and applicable sales tax exemptions
 - U.S. Department of Energy tips and suggestions for lowering your energy costs by 25%

Simply by implementing a few of these ideas, you will be able to keep warm and know that you are doing yourself, your family, your environment – and your wallet a great service!