



Going Green Can Save You Green

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Living WELL

A Newsletter of
Family and Consumer Sciences

<http://sites.ext.vt.edu/livingwell/>

Virginia Cooperative Extension

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Tame the Energy

Vampire

in Your Home



By Karen Lynn Poff, MPA, AFC®

Did you know that many household appliances use power even when they are turned off? “Vampire” power can account for 10 percent to 15 percent of your electric bill. If your normal bill is \$200, you can save \$20 to \$30 each month by taking some simple steps.

First, check your home for appliances that use standby power — a digital display, or “instant-on” feature likely uses standby power. The key to reducing your electric use is not only turning off these appliances, but also unplugging them. Your television uses \$35 per year of electricity when turned off but still plugged in. Cell phone chargers or other items with an

external power supply or a rechargeable battery use standby power. The average home has at least 20 such devices. Vampire power loss can add up to \$500 to \$800 dollars a year.

To conveniently cut power to appliances, use a good-quality surge protector. Plug your television, DVD player, audio system, and game system into one power strip. When you are finished watching, simply flip the switch on the power strip to break the circuit to all the appliances. Set-top boxes and digital video recorders that have a lengthy “reset” or “warm up” time can be plugged in separately using a timer that automatically turns them on 30 minutes before you normally watch television, giving them enough time to reset.

The only way to be certain about the amount of standby power an appliance uses is to measure it. Electricity usage monitors cost from \$30 to \$60 in electronics stores or can often be borrowed from your local Extension office.

Karen Lynn Poff is a Senior Family and Consumer Sciences Extension agent serving the northern Shenandoah Valley.

Decrease your vampire load by making energy-efficient choices when buying new products. Most items displaying an ENERGY STAR label use low standby power. See the website of the Federal Energy Management Program at <http://www.energystar.gov> for products with low standby power.



Going Green Can So



In these trying economic times, we're all looking for ways that are encouraging when actions that help the planet can help you save money that will lower your energy costs.

Start with your heating system.

Heating and cooling account for more than half of a home's energy costs. To keep your system running smoothly, have a contractor perform a yearly checkup.

Clean or replace your air filters monthly. Dirty air filters restrict airflow and increase energy use.

Install a programmable thermostat. Reducing the temperature by 5 degrees at night and 10 degrees during the work day when heating, and raising the temperature by equal amounts when cooling can save \$180 per year. A \$40 programmable thermostat will pay for itself in one year and relieves having to remember to lower and raise the temperature. Be sure to buy the programmable thermostat that is compatible with your type of heating system.

Install ceiling fans. In cold weather, reverse their direction (fan should spin clockwise) to recirculate warm air trapped beneath the ceiling. In hot weather, a ceiling fan helps you feel as comfortable at 75 degrees as in still air that is 70 degrees. Using ceiling fans instead of air conditioning can save \$30 per year per fan.

Reduce air leaks and add insulation. Heat loss through the ceiling and exterior walls is responsible for the majority of heating costs. On a windy day check for drafts and seal cracks with weather stripping or



caulking. Add storm windows or replace conventional windows with insulated glass to improve energy efficiency. Remove window air conditioners when no longer needed to prevent flow of cold air between the air conditioner and the window pane. Close the damper in your fireplace when not in use. Make sure you have at least 12 inches of insulation in your attic. Such improvements can reduce energy costs by more than 10 percent.

Install low-flow shower heads. Heating hot water is the second-largest use of home energy after heating and cooling air. Low-flow shower heads use about 50 percent of the water required by conventional showers.

Change your light bulbs. Lighting makes up about 10 percent of home energy costs. Switching from incandescent bulbs to compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) will save on lighting costs. Although the purchase



The *Living Well* newsletter was developed by the Family and Consumer Sciences program, Karen Roth Gehrt, associate director. The *Living Well* Editorial Board — co-chaired by C. Sprenger,

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Save You Green

ways to save money. So it is on our wallets, too. Here are a few ideas

price of CFLs is higher than incandescent bulbs, they use up to 75 percent less energy and last up to 10 times longer. On average, you can save \$45 over the life of the bulb.

See the Clip and Save feature for more resources on cutting energy costs.

Content for this article was contributed by Jennifer Abel M.S., AFC®, Family and Consumer Sciences agent serving Arlington County; and Latoyia Jones, former Family and Consumer Sciences agent in Stafford County.



Clip and Save

For more ideas on saving energy and keeping your family safe in winter, see the U.S. Department of Energy's Energy Savers program at www.energysavers.gov and the Environmental Protection Agency/ Department of Energy joint program, ENERGY STAR, at www.energystar.gov.

To review the items needed in a family disaster kit, see "Emergency Preparedness: Does Your Family Have a Disaster Kit?" in the Spring/Summer 2009 issue of Living Well at <http://sites.ext.vt.edu/livingwell/documents/Summer2009.pdf>.

The Energy Resource Guide for Virginia, developed by Virginia Cooperative Extension, accessible at <http://www.ext.vt.edu/resources/energyguide/> offers energy saving guidance for the home, farm, small business, or school.

extension, the web page of the national Cooperative Extension program of the United States Department of Agriculture, offers resources and Frequently Asked Questions on using and saving energy. Accessible at www.extension.org.

Home Winter Checklist Prevent Water Damage

- Insulate water pipes in crawl spaces and garages with foam or fiberglass coverings to prevent freezing. Water will flow from a broken pipe until the water is shut off; the resulting damage costs can reach thousands of dollars.
- Turn off the water supply to exterior faucets and drain remaining water.
- Clean leaves and other debris from gutters that may freeze and obstruct drainage. Leaf guards may be necessary to prevent gutter accumulation from nearby trees.
- Check integrity of flashing at roof-to-wall intersections, along chimneys, at eaves, and around skylights. Flashing is the thin metal strip that prevents water leakage where two building materials come together.

For more ideas on preventing winter damage, visit the International Association of Certified Home Inspectors at www.nachi.org/winterization.htm.



Living Well

Welcome to the Spring 2011 issue of *Living Well*, coming to you from Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) of Virginia Cooperative Extension. This issue focuses on saving energy to reduce both our carbon footprint and our monthly expenses. We hope this information will help you and yours "live well." If you have comments or suggestions about this newsletter, you can reach us at (540) 231-2450; livingwell@vt.edu, or Editor, 110 Hutcheson, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA 24061-0908. We would love to hear from you.

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NOTE: Rising postal rates continue to erode our budget for *Living Well*. If you have access to e-mail and the Internet and could receive your copy of *Living Well* electronically, we would appreciate hearing from you. Our e-mail readers receive their newsletter on the day our printed version goes to the post office, so you would hear from us a few days sooner. To change your subscription from postal mail to e-mail, call, write, or e-mail the Virginia Cooperative Extension office in your county. You can find their contact information at www.ext.vt.edu/offices. If you currently receive your subscription by e-mail, there's no need to be in touch with us.

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