

Ten Ways to Save Money, Energy and Protect Your Health This Winter

With winter quickly approaching, the USAG Humphreys Environmental Division is highlighting ten tips for all to protect their health, save money, and lower energy while enjoying the winter holiday season.

1. Maintain your heating equipment to lower utility bills. Heating and cooling costs account for about \$1,000 -- nearly half of a home's total annual energy bill. Maintaining the efficiency of your home's heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system can have a big effect on your utility bills. Dirt and neglect can impact the efficiency of your HVAC system and are some of the top causes of heating system failure. Schedule an HVAC checkup with a licensed HVAC contractor to make sure your system is operating at peak performance. Also, check your system's air filter every month and change it when it's dirty or at a minimum, every three months. A dirty filter will slow down air flow and make the system work harder to keep you warm or cool — wasting energy

2. Download EPA's free Apps to help protect your health. The AIRNow app allows users to enter a zip code and get current particle pollution and ozone levels and forecasts for more than 400 cities across the country. The Ultraviolet (UV) Index provides an hourly forecast of the UV radiation levels from the sun. Both are available for Apple and Android phones.

3. Decorate for the holidays with Energy Star light strings that can last up to 10 times longer. Energy Star-qualified light strings use about 65 percent less electricity than incandescent light strings and are available in a variety of colors, shapes and lengths. They save energy and are more durable, shock-resistant and cooler to the touch. If every decorative light string sold in the U.S. this year were Energy Star qualified, Americans would save \$80 million in utility bills and one billion pounds of greenhouse gas emissions would be prevented.

4. Lower the temperature in your home to increase savings up to 12 percent. Control your home's temperature while away or asleep by using one of the pre-programmed settings. Programming the thermostat to turn the temperature down 8 degrees for 7 hours each night and an additional 7 hours each weekday could result in a seasonal heating savings of approximately 12 percent. For the average home, this could result in savings of about \$180.

5. Check for water leaks and install WaterSense products to save approximately \$170 per year. The average household spends as much as \$500 per year on their water and sewer bill, but approximately \$170 per year can be saved by installing water-efficient fixtures and appliances.

6. Reduce your food waste. Feed people, not landfills. Food is the single largest type of waste going to landfills and incinerators. Americans disposed of approximately 33 million tons of food waste in 2010. When excess food, leftover food, and food scraps are disposed of in a landfill, they decompose and become a significant source of methane - a potent greenhouse gas. Much of the food that is discarded in landfills is actually safe, wholesome food that could have been used to feed people. So when you are thinking about making your family dinner, think about how you can reduce your food waste to save money, help communities, and protect the environment.

7. Look for the Design for the Environment label on more than 2,800 products during winter cleaning. EPA's Designed for the Environment (DfE) logo differentiates products that use only the safest ingredients to protect people, our pets, and the environment. In 2011, Americans using DfE products cut the use of harmful chemicals by more than 756 million pounds.

8. Test your home for radon gas, 1 in 15 homes may have elevated levels. Radon, a colorless odorless gas, is the leading cause of lung cancer among non-smokers and levels can increase during colder months. Purchase an affordable Do-It-Yourself test kit online or at a local hardware store to

determine the level in your home. Addressing high levels often costs the same as other minor home repairs.

9. Learn before you burn and cut firewood use by more than 30 percent. The Burn Wise program has best burn practices to help better protect your home and your health. Never burn garbage, cardboard, ocean driftwood or wet wood. If you replace an old wood stove with a more efficient one, efficiency can increase by 50 percent, 1/3 less wood can be used for the same heat and 70 percent less particle pollution indoors and out are produced.

10. Prevent Pests. Now is the time when pests such as insects and rodents may try to move indoors. Eliminate sources of food, water, and shelter to reduce pest problems. Prevent pests by using caulk to eliminate cracks, repair water leaks, remove clutter, and clean up crumbs and other food sources. If you decide to use a pesticide, read the label first. The pesticide label is your guide to using pesticides safely and effectively. It contains pertinent information that you should read and understand before you use a pesticide product.