



WANT TO SPEND LESS ON UTILITIES?

Look to utility companies for ideas to avoid billing shock

By Juliette Rule

As energy prices continue to be in headlines, many homeowners in Wyoming and beyond are seeking ways to decrease consumption, lower bills, and take advantage of tax and utility incentives.

The first step is to find out how much energy your home is using – and losing. A home energy audit is a great place to start.

“A home energy audit is an evaluation of how much energy a residence or commercial building is using,” explains Sharon Fain, external affairs manager for Cheyenne Light, Fuel & Power Company (Cheyenne Light). “An effective home energy audit can save you a lot of money while helping you with your energy efficiency efforts.”

Cheyenne Light (www.cheyennelight.com) is offering a \$150 rebate to help offset the cost for customers using a certified contractor for a home energy audit. A home energy auditor will visit your home and determine where energy losses are occurring, such as through drafty windows, inefficient furnaces, or poorly insulated walls.

The auditor will then suggest simple or more advanced methods to decrease energy losses and consumption. Homeowners can then decide what steps they want to pursue, what they can do themselves, and what they can hire others to tackle.

Most, if not all, utility companies serving Wyoming offer free tips and tools on their Web sites for determining possible energy-saving home improvements. Many of these sites provide do-it-yourself energy audit tools. Fain points to the Home Energy Suite on her company’s Web site, a slick interactive tool asking basic questions about a home’s appliances and square footage to calculate energy costs. The service is free, and it gives even the novice a few ideas on how to conserve no matter where he or she lives. To access the Home Energy Suite, scroll to the lower right of Cheyenne Light’s main Web page.

Why are utilities that serve Wyoming consumers, such as Cheyenne Light, promoting less use of their energy products?

“Energy efficiency programs can be a lower cost option than building a new power plant,” says Becky Eberle,



Rocky Mountain Power's Low Income Program manager. Utilities are getting into the game of going green with rebates, zero-interest loans, energy audit assistance, and other incentives designed to help save money in the long run. Rocky Mountain Power's Web site is www.rockymountainpower.net.

One way utilities promote energy conservation is through incentives to replace older household appliances with ENERGY STAR appliances. In 1992, the Environmental Protection Agency introduced ENERGY STAR as a voluntary labeling program to identify and promote energy-efficient products including household appliances (more at www.energystar.gov). Among the most tantalizing offers in appliance upgrades is Rocky Mountain Power's freezer and refrigeration replacement program. Call the company and it will recycle your old unit and give a \$30 incentive payment, too. Replace it with an ENERGY STAR-rated appliance and see another \$20 incentive.

Those who have upgraded appliances might still be wondering how to further reduce energy consumption. Questar Gas (www.questargas.com), through its ThermWise weatherization rebate program, is offering incentives on insulation, windows, and duct sealing, as are many other energy providers.

Many utilities also have incentives for buying programmable thermostats, which are sometimes called setback thermostats. These thermostats allow homeowners to program the temperature to a comfortable level when people are at home and to automatically increase (in the summer) or decrease (in the winter) the temperature in the house when no one is at home.

Kyle Mumm of Cheyenne, a board member of Wyoming Weatherization Services, says this is worth considering. "The advantages are obvious, especially for people who work and leave the house during the day. The energy savings can be significant." Wyoming Weatherization Services is a nonprofit program that helps residents having low incomes weatherize their homes.

In addition to other incentives and rebates, some

Wyoming utilities offer zero-interest loans. In 2008, Powder River Energy Corporation (PRECorp), a utility co-op serving northeast Wyoming, started offering zero-interest loans up to \$2,500 for members who can pay the loans back over three years. Replacing windows, installing ENERGY STAR appliances, even adding insulation – all are qualifying purchases. The Web site is www.precorp.coop.

"We don't offer rebates, but our loan program is offered to any member in good standing," says Doreen Schaar, PRECorp's vice president of communications and external relations. "It also qualifies for mobile homes, which are disqualified under some programs."

In energy conservation, small efforts can pay dividends, experts agree. Next to central air conditioning, lighting consumes the bulk of a home's energy bill.

"Probably the easiest thing, whether you're on a small-acreage or not, is using compact fluorescent lights," explains Rob Morris, energy services manager for Cheyenne Light. "That's a pretty simple thing to do."

Many energy conservation and house weatherization projects are easily completed by the homeowner and can add up to considerable savings. For more information, check out your local utility's Web site, or visit www.energysavers.gov for more information.

A FEW THINGS YOU CAN DO NOW TO SAVE ENERGY

- Caulk around exterior door and window frames
- Caulk around dryer vents and cable TV and phone lines
- Change incandescent light bulbs to compact fluorescents
- Turn off the power to computers and televisions when not in use
- Insulate hot water pipes
- Lower water heating temperature
- Add weather stripping to drafty doors



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