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MANAGING IN TOUGH TIMES INITIATIVE

FAMILY FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

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THIS MONTH’S TOPIC:

Preparing Your Home for Cold Weather

Although the hot days of August may still be fresh in your mind, it is time to start preparing your home for cold weather. Early fall is the perfect time to begin so you are prepared for the first cold snap. There are several no-cost or low-cost improvements that can be made to your home to reduce winter bills.

According to the United States Department of Energy, 46% of the average utility bill goes to heating and cooling a home. To reduce heating costs, adjust the thermostat to the lowest comfortable temperature. You may also want to consider a programmable thermostat, which allows you to automatically set it to turn up and down the heat or air when you are not home. Lowering the heat while you are at work, the Department of Energy estimates you can save about \$180 per year in energy costs.

To maximize savings from a programmable thermostat, it is important to have the thermostat set to its energy-saving temperature for a minimum of eight hours. Consider not only cutting back the thermostat while you are at work, but also at night. If you are going to be away for several days, choose an energy-saving temperature for the entire time the house is empty.

If you do not have a programmable thermostat, you can still save by manually adjusting the temperature. In general, for every degree you lower your thermostat, you save one to three percent on your heating bill. For example, if you adjust your thermostat from 74 degrees to 72 degrees, you could save up to \$0.06 for every \$1.00 in heating costs. If your home heating bill costs \$100 per month, you could save up to \$6.00.



This winter keep warm and save energy, and money.

To extend the life of your furnace replace furnace filters on a monthly basis. If you have pets, check the filters more often. To help prevent drafts, caulk between window/door frames and walls, weather-strip between doors and frames, and add storm windows or use plastic film kits to cover single-pane windows. Also, do not underestimate the value of natural sunlight during cold weather. Keep the window coverings on south-facing windows open during the day to allow the sunlight to warm the house, but remember to close drapes and shades in the evening.

In addition to making a few low-cost home improvements, you can also reduce energy expenses by adapting no-cost energy conscious behaviors. Simple behaviors that help save energy include turning off lights and electronics when not in use, using cold water for laundry, and only doing full loads in the dishwasher, clothes washer, and dryer. Check the temperature setting on your hot water tank. If it is currently set on high or 140 degrees, lower it the medium setting or 120 degrees. This can cut the cost of heating hot water by 6 to 10 percent, or up to 10 cents off of every dollar you spend.

Finally, if you are thinking about the purchase of a large, durable appliance, consider Energy Star qualified products. Energy-efficient appliances include high-efficiency furnaces, air conditioners, or heat pumps, clothes dryers with moisture sensors, and clothes washers and dishwashers that save water.

Written by: Jennifer Hunter, Ph.D., Assistant Extension Professor, Family Financial Management.

By turning back the temperature during the day, you can save about \$180 per year in energy costs.

This winter keep warm, and save energy and money by following a few simple steps.

- Have your heating and cooling system checked seasonally, and clean or change the air filter monthly. A dusty air filter can result in increased energy use, higher energy costs, and premature equipment failure.
- Check your home for air leaks. Fill gaps and cracks with caulk or insulation.
- Open curtains and shades during the day to allow the warmth of the sun in, and close them during the night to prevent heat loss.
- Use multiple layers of bedding and throws to stay warm without adjusting the thermostat.
- Use area rugs on tile, wood, or laminate floors.
- Install glass fireplace doors to reduce drafts and loss of heated air.
- When you leave your house for the day or for extended periods of time, turn the thermostat down several degrees.
- And finally, when the time comes to replace old heating equipment, purchase an energy star replacement. Ask for energy star products when purchasing a furnace, heat pump, boiler, or programmable thermostat.

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