

Energy-Efficiency: Where You Can Save and How
by Sonja Koukel
Health, Home & Family Development

Are you making plans on how to spend the rebate coming your way in May? President Bush signed the Economic Stimulus Bill that is designed to send rebates of \$300 to \$1200 to people who file their 2007 tax returns. I know I was looking forward to some extra cash. Thanks to a natural disaster affecting the Juneau area, however, I don't need to wonder where the rebate will go. It will be used to help pay for home energy costs over the next few months.

The natural disaster I'm referring to was the major avalanche that cut hydroelectric power to Juneau on April 16, 2008. At the time of this writing, the Juneau area is looking at rate increases from 11-cents/kwh to more than 50-cents/kwh. No doubt the new rate will be in effect by the time of this publication. Experts predict that the rates will continue for at least 3 months, perhaps longer.

What does this mean to the average consumer? Most of us spent the winter tightening our belts due to increased energy rates. If you weren't conserving energy prior to this disaster, it's time to get serious.

When first I heard the news, the rate hikes were predicted to be about 30-cents/kwh. The Cooperative Extension Service publication, *Appliance Energy Use and Costs in Alaska* (EEM-00251), provides a electric usage chart. I used the chart to determine the average cost of using a clothes dryer as these appliances use large amounts of energy.

On average, clothes dryers use 4856 watts at 204 hours/year of usage. Total kwh/year = 993. At 11-cents/kwh the cost for running the clothes dryer is approximately \$109 for the year. At 30-cents/kwh, the cost is approximately \$298; and, at 50-cents/kwh, we're looking at \$497! Keep in mind, this is just one of many household appliances.

In this article, I'm going to provide a couple of quick and easy energy savings tips. For the next couple of months, I will target specific areas where we can conserve energy in our homes.

If you haven't already switched to compact fluorescent lamps, now is the time to do so. This is the simplest way to shave significant amounts off electricity bills. Fortunately, the days are getting longer so we'll be able to make use of natural daylight. Rearrange furniture to maximize daylight useful for reading, cooking, or other work.

You may not be aware that many appliances continue to draw power even when switched off. These "phantom loads" occur in most appliances that use electricity, such as TVs, VCR/DVDs, computers, kitchen appliances, and anything with a clock. The energy use of electronic equipment often goes unnoticed. But as it turns out, an estimated 10-15% of all electricity used in American homes can be attributed to the buzz of electronic devices.

The simplest and most obvious way to eliminate power losses is to unplug products when not in use. Search the wall sockets in your house for hidden un-connected chargers and other devices that don't need to be plugged in. When you detach your cell phone or similar device from its charger, unplug the charger too. These power supplies consume electricity as long as they are connected to a power outlet, whether or not the product is on or off, and even if it is disconnected. You'll know a charger is using energy when it has been plugged in for a while and it is warm to the touch.

Use a power strip with an on/off switch for home electronics, appliances, and office equipment. This allows you to turn off all power to the devices in one easy step. Once the power strip is turned off, no power will be delivered to the outlets, thereby eliminating power wasted by power supplies.

Once I heard of the impending power rate increases, I went through the house and unplugged all chargers not in use. I lowered the thermostat to 65-degrees F and built a wood fire to take the chill out of the air. All my kitchen appliances are connected to power strips that are turned off when not in use. I unplugged the microwave, coffee maker and everything else with a clock.

If there are specific questions or concerns you have about energy savings techniques, I invite you to contact me. Next month, I'll address cooking appliances. In the meantime, get more information from the Extension district office or the home web site, www.uaf.edu/ces/energy