

Lighting is a big deal here in Alaska. The Land of the Midnight Sun will soon turn into the land of the 18-hour night. So if we are trying to reduce our electric bills this may not be the favorite place to cut. But there are ways to reduce costs without affecting your quality of life.

Here's an amazing fact. About 10% of the energy used by a regular incandescent light bulb goes to produce light. The rest is wasted as heat. Though heat is always nice in our cold winters, it is very inefficient heat at a very high cost.

Energy efficient lights produce more light than heat with the electricity they use. As a result, they can provide the same amount of light as a standard bulb, using less energy. Since lighting can use as much as 20% of the house energy bill, conservation here can amount to a considerable savings.

Compact fluorescent lights offer the greatest potential for energy savings. These use the same technology as a regular fluorescent light you are used to seeing in commercial buildings. These lights use about one fourth the electricity of a standard bulb. You can choose bulbs with a much smaller wattage to get the light you need. They also last ten times longer than incandescent bulbs, so are great to use in places where the bulbs are more difficult to change.

Halogen bulbs are another energy efficient home lighting option. These bulbs are actually incandescent bulbs with halogen gas inside the bulb. This gas means about 30% more light for the same amount of electricity, and the light quality is brighter and whiter. They also last about twice as long as regular incandescent.

When choosing bulbs, the new labels now required will help make your job easier. Manufacturers must show the bulbs output (measured in lumens), how much energy is required, and how long the bulb is expected to last. These labels will give you the opportunity to choose what works best for each location in your house.

The output varies from manufacturer to manufacturer so it is important to read the labels. Here are some rules of thumb. A 13-16 watt compact fluorescent puts out the same number of lumens as a 60-watt incandescent. A 20-watt compact fluorescent equals a 75-watt incandescent, and a 23-28 compact fluorescent produces the same light as a 100 watt.

Regardless of the type of bulb you choose, use these tips to save energy while lighting your house:

- Turn off the lights when not using them.
- Take advantage of natural light from windows.
- Don't use more light than you need.
- Focus light where it is needed most.
- Regularly dust light bulbs and fixtures. Not only does it obstruct light, but it shortens the life of the bulb.

Choose lighting carefully to conserve electricity.