In spite of our wishes, the summer season will soon be at an end and winter will be upon us. Taking a few minutes now will help you conserve money on fuel and electricity this winter.

The average family in the U.S. spends $2,000 per year on energy. Most of us in Alaska would love to spend only that much with many bills almost double this amount. So conserved energy means less dollars spent.

The time to make energy changes is now, not when it is 40 below. Take some simple steps to keep the cold out when winter comes.

The first step is to take stock of where you are from an energy standpoint. There are three different levels of energy audits. You can call a professional to do a formal audit, call the electric company for a home$ense audit, or you can do it yourself.

If you want a formal audit, call one of our local professional auditors. They will do an in-depth examination of your home and supply you with conservation ideas. It will cost you between $450 and $600 for the complete evaluation of your home’s energy star rating.

Alaska Housing Finance Corporation is still offering up to $10,000 as a rebate for improving the energy rating in your home. The program repays you for money spent on improving energy conservation features. The program requires a beginning audit from a professional home inspector who recommends the most effective techniques for your home. You (or your contractor) make the repairs, then the home is re-inspected.

The program pays you based on how much your energy star rating goes up between the first and second inspection. In addition, it will pay for a portion of the inspections. This state-sponsored program is a real boon for those who intend to make energy saving repairs. Be sure to check out the details on the website at www.ahfc.us and look for the page that is titled Home Energy Rebate. It also has a list of trained home energy raters.

Low-income individuals can also call Interior Weatherization. The technicians will inspect your home and let you know what energy conservation techniques are most appropriate for your home. Interior Weatherization will make those repairs at no cost to eligible individuals. It has a sliding scale of eligibility based on number of residents and income levels. Be sure to call 452-
5323 or check its website for applications. Funds are quickly used up, so be sure to get on the list as soon as possible.

Golden Valley Electric has a Home$ense program that will cost you about $20 and will take about an hour. The efficiency specialist will provide you some energy-saving equipment and will provide educational materials to help you make energy saving decisions. Call Golden Valley to schedule a time to have your home inspected. Its website gives details of the Home$ense program at www.gvea.com.

You can do the job yourself with just a little time and diligence. Think about air leakage — that’s where the greatest difference can be made at your home. Go outside and look for cracks around doors and windows. Caulk those holes. A one-sixteenth of an inch crack around a standard window is the same as having a 4-by-4-inch hole in your wall. If you had that kind of a hole, you would cover it, so be sure to treat the cracks in the same manner.

Replace the weatherstripping around your outside doors. Many types of weatherstripping are available at our local lumberyards and home improvement stores. Most weatherstripping can be replaced for less than $15 per door.

If your windows are leaky, consider using a window film to protect from outside temperatures. For less than $10 you can cover a large window. The film is installed with a self-adhesive strip and is shrunk to fit the window by using a hair dryer. This is a more cost-effective solution than replacing windows.

If you aren’t sure where to start when checking your house, Extension has a publication called “Home Electricity Audit” available on the web at http://bit.ly/audit-electric. Or call our office at 474-5211 and we’ll send it out to you.

No matter how you decide to check your home, be sure to take steps now to make energy conservation improvements that will save you money this winter.

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