The high energy-consuming months are just ahead of us. This week I’m turning over the news column to Art Nash, the Extension energy specialist, to give us some good hints on reducing our bills this winter.

The fall season, by the looks of the fireweed and leaves turning in some areas, feels like it is here. Several inches of snow have already fallen up north — before the end of August. So, due diligence with the nice days we have left may help you conserve money on fuel and electricity expenditures this winter.

The average family Alaska family spends several thousands of dollars a year on heat and electricity. We often consider alternative ways of utilizing our wind, sunshine and water turbulence to produce energy for home consumption. But, the most bang for your buck starts with working on ways to make your home more energy efficient. Conserved energy means less dollars spent.

Start by evaluating your house or shop with an energy audit. There are three levels of audits to consider: the professional or formal audit, an informal audit with the local electric company or a do-it-yourself audit using a checklist. Extension’s “Home Electricity Audit” publication has a checklist and is available at http://bit.ly/audit-electric.

If you want a formal audit, you can look up a local professional auditor. Contact the Alaska Housing Finance Corp. for a list in your area at www.ahfc.us. Auditors go over your home with a fine-toothed comb by utilizing software with measurements of consumption. They establish a benchmark using the standards in the AHFC rebate program as well as talk over ideas on how to increase efficiency.

Some utilities, such as Golden Valley Electric, have a local program for an informal audit. It costs around $20 and may take roughly an hour. These audits often give you ideas for improvements you can do for yourself with just a little time and diligence.

The most expensive parts of the energy bill are those that should be looked at first. For most of us, the first items are your furnace and hot water heater. Often tuning up the furnace or boiler can get you more energy from your given fuel. If these heating units are showing their age, you may consider replacing them with a more efficient and newer digitally controlled model. On-demand hot water heaters, regardless of fuel type, tend to be more efficient than large cylindrical electric ones.
Next, insulate, insulate and insulate. See where there are cracks on the exterior. Put fiberglass or blown-in cellulose in the attic or roof. And also make sure that the basement walls have adequate foam board around the walls.

Next, think about air leakage, and look by first checking for cracks around doors and windows. Caulk those holes with a non-shrinking latex or silicone material. Replace the weather stripping around your outside doors as it can be replaced for less than $15. Next, put up window film (no more than half an inch from the window) to protect from outside temperatures. Be sure to choose the type that is installed with a self-adhesive strip and can be shrunk to fit windows by using a hair dryer.

Now, take a look at those electric appliances. What kind of wattage do they use? Often your local utility has a Kill-a-Watt or similar meter that you can attach to the outlet or on the appliance to see what its pull is on power. Compare with other brands and new models, especially on big-ticket items like the refrigerator, washer, dryer, etc.

You want to see your home as an overall energy consumer, and want to bring down the kilowatt-hours it uses. Where can you trim? Where can you save? Then you can start thinking about new investments in energy-producing products for your home!

For questions, contact me at 907-474-6366 or alnashjr@alaska.edu.
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