



Extension News Column

University of Alaska Fairbanks, Cooperative Extension Service, www.uaf.edu/ces/fycit@uaf.edu, 907-474-5211, FAX 907-474-6885

Contact: Debbie Carter, information officer, 907-474-5406, dscarter@alaska.edu

Author: Roxie Dinstel, Tanana District Extension Faculty, HHFD, 474-2426, rrdinstel@alaska.edu

Re: Pinching Pennies column

It's January and the temperatures are hovering in that 30 below region. Though we'd like to complain about the temperatures — and we do complain — this is pretty normal for us. It is Alaska and it is cold in the wintertime. However, we do spend a good portion of our time trying to stay warm.

I'm sure you've had one of those days recently when you returned to the house and were chilled to the bone. The natural tendency is to crank up the thermostat or add another stick of wood to the fire. Sometimes, you can't seem to shake the cold no matter how high you turn up the thermostat.

With every degree you turn up the thermostat, you are increasing your heating bills by 2 percent. As we look for ways to decrease the money spent on our heating, don't forget to think about the thermal comfort of your home.

There are six major variables that determine how cold or hot a person feels. These are air temperature, air speed, humidity, radiant heat, activity level and clothing. The first four factors are hard to change in an Alaska winter, but the last two can be easily changed to increase your comfort level.

One way to warm up is to increase your activity level. We tend to huddle under the blanket and shiver. Get up and get moving. As you increase your activity, it increases heat output by burning more energy. If you are sitting quietly and increase your activity by standing, you automatically feel about 2 degrees warmer. Move that activity up to house cleaning and you increase your personal warmth by 2 more degrees.

Choosing appropriate clothing is the easiest way to increase your comfort level and reduce your energy consumption. When thinking about keeping warm, think fuzzy. Fleeeces, flannels and wools trap air next to the body and increase body temperatures. Garments made with several layers, or layering garments together, will help keep the body warmer by trapping warm air between the layers. Garments designed with cuffs around the sleeve, neck or leg openings block out cold air and keep warm air in.

The final step is to work on the perception of warmth. Get a warm drink such as cocoa or hot tea. Warm yourself from the inside out. Put on socks or even take a nice warm bath or a hot shower. Take your hot drink to the shower and you'll be even warmer.

It may be less expensive to use a small space heater than cranking up the furnace if you only want to heat one room or supplement inadequate heating in a certain area. However, for the strategy to work, you have to keep all the doors to the room closed.

Spring will come; we just have to stay warm and financially solvent until then.

Roxie Rodgers Dinstel is a professor of extension on the Tanana District Extension Faculty. Questions or column requests can be e-mailed to her at rrdinstel@alaska.edu.