



Extension News Column

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We love our electronics. Big screen televisions, cable services, computers and video games all are great for entertainment, but are big time energy consumers. Those electronic devices consume 10 to 15% of all electricity used in the home. The biggest users of power are the home entertainment systems and computers, but small energy users such as portable devices with battery chargers use their share of the power. Not because they use so much, but just because of the sheer number of these devices.

In electronics, off does not necessarily mean that it isn't using power. In fact, while a Plasma television uses 246 watts while it is operating, it still uses 3 watts just sitting there waiting to be turned on. Your DVR/TiVo or your digital cable uses the same amount of power whether it is operating or just waiting to turn on, 37 watts for the TiVo or 26 for the digital cable.

If you see a light burning on the device, it is using power. The microwave has a clock that draws power all the time, and there are little lights on many of these appliances. Look for the lights, that shows you where the energy is going. The simplest and most effective way to eliminate power losses is to unplug products when not in use. It may be a pain to reset the clock on some devices, but ask yourself if you really use that clock. Search the wall sockets for unused battery chargers that are plugged in. When you detach your charged cell phone from the charger, unplug it as well.

You may want to use a power meter to find out where most energy is being used in your home. This will help you decide which items to unplug, or maybe even replace. Plug the equipment into the device and then into the wall socket to see how much energy it uses. Two of the leading meters are the Kill A Watt or the Watts Up? Pro Power Meter. Golden Valley Electric gave the Kill A Watt meters away at last year's owners meeting, so if you missed your chance, pick one up at the store.

If plugging the device isn't handy, use a power strip. Plug home electronics and office equipment into a single power strip with an on/off switch. This will allow you to turn them off in one easy step. But remember to keep your power strip in an easy to reach location. Once the strip is turned off, no power will be delivered to the outlets. This works great for the computers in my house. Some electronic equipment such as TVs, cable and satellite boxes, and DVRs need to be reprogrammed or given time to reboot and download information when turned back on. You probably won't want to unplug these unless you are going to be gone a few days.

Now if you are buying new appliances, make those choices energy efficient. Look for the Energy Star when purchasing a new TV, DVD player or any electronics equipment. This will ensure that your new equipment will use less power when operating, but also when it is on standby waiting to be used.

A plasma television uses five times as much power as a LCD television and a desktop computer uses three times as much power as a laptop. So even within item groups, there are big differences in energy consumption. Do your homework and know what you are buying. You may feel that there are some features that are worth the extra power expenditure. That's up to you. You know what fits your needs and your power bill. Take all the factors into consideration when purchasing a new piece of electronic equipment, not only the original cost, but also the power it takes to run it.