

For additional details, contact:

Amy Lewis
Strategy Communications
Phone: 619-713-0622 (office) / 858-752-1085 (mobile)
E-mail: amy@scpublicrelations.com



PRESS RELEASE

WINTER CHILLS WILL BRING HIGH BILLS

How to Keep Those Utility Bills Low This Winter

SAN DIEGO, January 9, 2008 - Are you worried about how you are going to make ends meet through the holiday season? Over the holiday season, many families will have get togethers, and with this extra family time comes a higher utility bill due to more people and events in your home. The U.S. Energy Information Administration projects costs will increase this year for all home-heating fuels. Last year the average winter fuel bill was \$889. This year it's expected to jump to \$977. Before you panic about the extra bills during this festive time of year, read on for some useful tips on how to reduce your utility expenses over the chilly winter months.

First, call your utility company to see if they will provide a free audit on your residence. This will tell you where your leaks are and give you a starting point in fixing the problem. Once you know where the leaks are (or even if you don't), **Debt-Free America offers the following tips to help reduce your utility bill this holiday season.**

QUICK AND EASY TIPS FOR EVERYONE

- Put throw blankets on the sofa, so you can use them while relaxing during a cool winter evening without turning on the heat.
- Wear warm sweatshirts, sweatpants or pajama bottoms, instead of wearing a t-shirt and shorts while at home. This will allow you to keep your thermostat set at a lower temperature.
- Spend more time in or around the kitchen, where it is naturally warmer because of the use of the stove and oven.
- Invest in a heating blanket or heavy comforter for your bed.
- Reverse your ceiling fan direction. It will blow the warm air that normally rise up down and help keep your room a bit warmer.
- Make your home more energy efficient by wrapping your exposed hot water pipes. With an investment of \$22 at a local major home improvement store and two hours of time, you can wrap your copper hot water pipes with tubular insulators. You will not only reduce your water consumption but reduce your gas bill. And the biggest bonus is the water gets to the needed application quicker and hotter.
- If you install a programmable thermostat, you can save about \$150 a year in energy costs and it costs less than \$50.

MORE PERMANENT SOLUTIONS

Floors

Start with under the floor. You may find that floors are usually the least of your problems however make sure they are well insulated. If they are not well insulated you can purchase insulation at any hardware store. The insulation comes with instructions and is fairly easy to install. If you have hardwood floors, you can also put large throw rugs down to keep the heat in better.

Switches and Sockets

You would be surprised how much air drifts through your sockets and switches. Go to your local hardware store and look for the insulated plates. If you can't find them don't be ashamed to ask, not a lot of people have heard of them. If you can't find the insulated plates, you can get the expandable foam insulation and put it in the empty space around the outlet.

Windows

Most people are hesitant about covering their windows due to the large amount needed to be covered in their home, which will become costly. However, it will be more beneficial in the long run because of the reduction in your utility bill.

First, measure your windows and be sure to be exact as possible. Then, go to your local hardware store and find the plastic part that can be installed inside the house and tightened with a hairdryer. Stick the plastic to the rim of the window with adhesive that has been included, cut the plastic to fit the window, and then slowly tighten the plastic with a hairdryer. This costs around \$100.

If that is still out of your price range, you can also use heavy duty curtains on your windows. If you are looking for something that is pleasing to the eye or not as noticeable the plastic, curtains may be best. It will also help keep that summer heat out too.

Insulation

You should also check the thickness of the insulation in your attic. Be sure you are wearing gloves and a mask so you don't inhale the fiberglass. The insulation should be about 14 inches thick to reach an R-38 level.

"R" stands for resistance to winter heat loss and summer heat gain and is more precise than inches in designating insulation performance. Although one type or brand of insulation is thicker or thinner than the other, it will provide the same resistance to heat loss if the R-value is the same.

Keep in mind that the majority of houses only have about 6-8 inches of insulation so double checking your thickness is important this winter. Also, depending on how old the house is or the area that you live in you should check for small cracks in the exterior of your home and fill those with insulation so they don't let the cold air in either.

Debt-Free America is a 501(c)3 non-profit, community service organization offering confidential and professional credit counseling, debt management programs, and financial education to consumers nationwide. Debt-Free America is dedicated to providing FREE services to help financially distressed families and individuals effectively manage their personal finances. The Board members and operations staff have a long-term commitment to helping anyone in debt crisis, and even those not in a debt crisis. Debt-Free America has been in the business since 1997 and is now serving over 16,000 clients nationwide. Visit them on the web at www.debtfreeamerica.com.

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