



Contra Costa County
 Employment & Human Services Department
 Community Services Bureau
 Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program



LOW INCOME HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM CHECKLIST

Methods to submit your application:

Mail your complete application to:

Online: CALIHEAPApply.com
 Email: csbheap@ehsd.cccounty.us

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program
 1470 Civic Court, Ste. 200, Concord CA 94520
 Phone: 925-655-0960

ATTENTION: PRIORITY POINTS FOR 2026 LIHEAP WILL BE ENFORCED.

All LIHEAP applicants are responsible for providing the following documentation required by federal, state and local regulations. Without the requested information, your application cannot be processed and may be denied. Upon receipt and review of your application, you will receive a written notification of your eligibility and status.

Please check each box once completed to ensure all documents are received in our office:

| | |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <input type="checkbox"/> Complete and SIGN “Energy Intake Form” (CSD 43 05/2025). 2. <input type="checkbox"/> Complete and SIGN “Statement of Citizenship or Non-Citizen Status” CSD 600 on BOTH sides. 3. <input type="checkbox"/> Provide a copy of a birth certificate or green card verifying legal status in the USA for the person applying for assistance. 4. <input type="checkbox"/> Provide a copy of government-issued photo identification (ID). 5. <input type="checkbox"/> If you or any member in the household are a current CalFresh/CalWORKs recipient, provide a copy of your benefit letter. You will not be required to provide proof of income, but must self-report income for each household member(s) on the Energy Intake Form (CSD 43 05/2025). 6. <input type="checkbox"/> Provide a copy of your current monthly utility bill PLUS include your <u>past due</u>, <u>15-day</u> or <u>48hr notice</u> if one is received. Sending only your 15-day, 48-hour or shut off notice will delay your application process. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current monthly utility bill, within 6 weeks from intake date, must have at <u>least 22 billing days</u>. • The person's name on the PG&E bill must be 18 years of age or older. ID verification is required if name on utility bill is different from the name of applicant. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. <input type="checkbox"/> Copies of the total GROSS MONTHLY INCOME for ALL household members 18 years and older (must be within 6 weeks from intake date). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If there is zero income; a “Certification of Income and Expenses” Form (CSD 43B) will need to be completed for each adult without income. • If you are reporting zero income for a consecutive year, a “Survey of Income and Expenses” form will need to be completed for each adult without income PLUS provide documentation of your living expenses (a letter from the person/agency that supports the applicant’s rental, food and/or utility expenses). 8. <input type="checkbox"/> Complete and SIGN “Client Education Confirmation of Receipt” (Form CSD 321) 9. <u>IF APPLICABLE:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form CSD 081 “Account Holder Authorization and Consent” must be signed by the account holder (only if the applicant is not the account holder on the utility bill). Copy of ID is required. • Birth certificates or documentation verifying any children ages 0-5 in the household and/or identification for any household members 60 years or older. |
|---|---|

Acceptable Proof of Legal Status

► Citizenship status (if you were born in the USA):

- A copy of the birth certificate for **the person applying for assistance and all children under 5 years**
- A copy of your child's birth certificate **ONLY** if it states your name and **where YOU were born**
- A copy of your marriage license **ONLY** if it states your name and **where YOU were born**
- A copy of your U.S. passport
- Military Form DD 214; **IF** it states place of birth (*if form does not state place of birth, it will NOT be acceptable proof*)
- A copy of REAL ID card

► Naturalization status:

- A copy of your naturalization certificate
- A copy of your U.S. passport, showing your nationality as the United States of America (*must not be expired*)

► Alien status:

- A copy of both sides of your green card (*must not be expired*)
- A copy of any other document listed on the "Statement of Citizenship Status" Form

Acceptable Proof of Government Identification

- State identification (ID) card
- Tribal identification (ID) card
- Driver license
- U.S. passport or passport card
- U.S. military card (front and back)
- Military dependent's ID card (front and back)
- Permanent Resident Card
- Certificate of Citizenship
- Certificate of Naturalization
- Employment Authorization Document

Providing Proof of Income

(provide ALL income that applies to you)

- Income (total monthly gross) from **ALL household members 18 years and older**.
- Income must be current to within 6 weeks from the intake date and should cover a one-month period (Example, if you get paid once a week, send in 4 check stubs).
- All documents must be official, **no hand written information**.
- All documents must be **current (within the last 6 weeks from intake date)**.
- Current CalFresh/CalWORKs recipients must self-report income for each household members on the Energy Intake Form (CSD 43 05/2025), and will not be required to provide proof of income.
- Ask a LIHEAP Representative for other acceptable income if it's not listed below.

Samples of Acceptable Proof:

- Paycheck stubs, odd jobs, self-employment, income & expenses report
- Welfare (TANF)
- Social Security (a letter from Soc. Sec. or a direct deposit statement of your bank account)
- Social Security Disability Income / State Disability Insurance award letter
- Spousal & child support award documents
- Workman's Comp check stubs
- Unemployment Insurance check stubs
- Retirement & Pension award letter or check stubs
- "Survey of Income and Expenses"; for every member in the household 18yrs or older with NO Income.



JASON WIMBLEY Director
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 Sacramento, CA 95833
 (916) 576-7109
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2026 FACT SHEET ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

LOW-INCOME HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (LIHEAP)

Established in 1981, LIHEAP is a federally funded program that helps low-income households pay their energy bill. Assistance is in the form of a dual or single party warrant or a direct payment to a utility company on behalf of an eligible applicant. Eligibility is based on the household's total monthly income, which cannot exceed the 2026 LIHEAP Income Guidelines listed below. Current recipients of CalFresh or CalWORKs benefits are categorically eligible for the program. Because of significant funding cuts, the federal government enacted a law requiring that states target households with low-incomes and high energy costs, taking into consideration households with elderly and disabled persons, and children under six. This means there could be households that received assistance in the past and will no longer receive assistance because they fall into a low priority group and are not considered among the neediest of the needy. The amount of assistance is based on the number of persons in the household, total gross household income, the cost of energy within the county the households resides, and funding availability. LIHEAP provides one payment per program year. Under most circumstances, it takes approximately six weeks to process an application and pay the applicant. However, an incomplete/incorrect application will take additional time to process. Persons living in board-and-care facilities, nursing or convalescent homes, or in jail or prison, are not eligible for LIHEAP.

The local community services agencies are responsible for processing applications and the Department of Community Services and Development (CSD) is responsible for issuing LIHEAP payments. To find out how to apply for services, please call, **---(925) 655-0960**

Utility companies throughout the state offer reduced rate programs. Customers should contact their utility company to find out if they offer such a program and to request an application.

WEATHERIZATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Weatherization is the process of making your home more "air tight" and energy efficient. The goal is to keep the warm air in and the cold air out in the winter; and keep the cold air in and the warm air out in the summer. Weatherizing your home could help lower your energy usage and utility costs. Your home will be assessed to determine what weatherization work can be done. The most common types of weatherization include: sealing the holes and cracks, insulation, weather stripping, fixing windows, water heater blankets and making sure your heating and air condition systems are working correctly.

Free weatherization services are available to low income property owners and renters. Eligibility is based on the household's total monthly income, which cannot exceed the income guidelines listed below. Current recipients of CalFresh or CalWORKs benefits are categorically eligible for the program. To find out if you qualify, you must contact your local service provider. To find out how to apply for services, please call, **(925) 655-2714**.

2026 LIHEAP INCOME GUIDELINES

| Size of Household | Monthly Income |
|-------------------|----------------|
| 1 | \$3,331.66 |
| 2 | \$4,356.83 |
| 3 | \$5,382.00 |
| 4 | \$6,407.16 |
| 5 | \$7,432.25 |
| 6 | \$8,457.41 |
| 7 | \$8,649.66 |
| 8 | \$8,841.83 |
| 9 | \$9,034.08 |
| 10 | \$9,226.25 |

NOTE: Income amounts for family sizes greater than six persons were determined based on the following calculation: Add 3% to 132% for each additional family member, multiply the new percentage by \$76,886, and divide by 12. Example: household size of 7: $132\% + 3\% = 135\% \times \$76,886 = \$103,796 \div 12 = \$8,649.66$ per month.

CLIENT EDUCATION CONFIRMATION OF RECEIPT

| | | | | | |
|---|------|------|------------|------------------------|-------------|
| Name of Occupant | | | | Age of Dwelling N/A | |
| Address of Dwelling | | | | | |
| Confirmation of Receipt | | | | | |
| I have received the following information: | | | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lead-Safe Education – A copy of the pamphlet, <i>Renovate Right: Important Lead Hazard Information for Families, Child Care Providers, and Schools</i> , informing me of the potential risk of the lead hazard exposure from weatherization/renovation activity to be performed in my dwelling unit. | | | | | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Energy Education – Information regarding changes I can make in order to reduce the energy consumption of my household. | | | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mold and Moisture Education - A copy of the pamphlet, <i>A Brief Guide to Mold and Moisture In Your Home</i> , informing me of how to clean up residential mold problems and how to prevent mold growth. | | | | | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Budget Counseling - Information regarding personal financial management. | | | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Radon Education - A copy of the pamphlet, <i>A Citizen's Guide to Radon</i> , informing me of the potential risk of radon and how to lower the radon level in my dwelling unit. | | | | | |
| Signature of Recipient | | | | Date | |
| Self-Certification Option | | | | | |
| I certify that I attempted to deliver the following educational information to the dwelling listed above: | | | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lead-Safe <input type="checkbox"/> Energy <input type="checkbox"/> Mold/Moisture <input type="checkbox"/> Budget Counseling <input type="checkbox"/> Radon | | | | | |
| <i>If the information was delivered but a signature was not obtainable, you may check the appropriate box below.</i> | | | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Refusal to Sign — I certify that I have made a good faith effort to deliver the information to the dwelling unit listed above at the date and time indicated and that the occupant refused to sign the confirmation of receipt. I further certify that I have left a copy of the information at the unit with the occupant. | | | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unavailable for Signature — I certify that I have made a good faith effort to deliver the information to the dwelling unit listed above and that the occupant was unavailable to sign the confirmation of receipt. I further certify that I have left a copy of the information at the unit by sliding it under the door. | | | | | |
| Attempted delivery dates and times | | | | | |
| Date | Time | Date | Time | Date | Time |
| Signature (Agency Representative) | | | Print name | | |
| Mailing Option: | | | | | |
| I certify that I have mailed the following educational information to the dwelling listed above (attach copy of Certificate of Mailing for lead-safe education only): | | | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lead-Safe <input type="checkbox"/> Energy <input type="checkbox"/> Mold/Moisture <input type="checkbox"/> Budget Counseling <input type="checkbox"/> Radon | | | | | |
| Signature (Agency Representative) | | | Print name | | Date mailed |

ENERGY SAVERS TIPS



{ Ways to **Save Energy** in your home



CONTRA COSTA COUNTY COMMUNITY SERVICES BUREAU

**Low Income Home Energy
Assistance Program (LIHEAP)**

Ph: 925-655-0960 Fx: 925-229-6784

Weatherization Program

Ph: 925-655-2714 Fx: 925-655-3005



SAVING ENERGY AT HOME

Every month you pay to power your home. You pay for electricity. You pay for heat. You pay for water. All those costs add up.

But you can save money on your utility bills. How? By making your home more energy efficient.

An efficient home uses the energy you pay for as wisely as possible, with as little waste as possible. In an efficient home, the money you spend to power your home will stay in your home instead of leaking out because of poor insulation, a wasteful air-conditioning system, or other problems.

Creating an energy-efficient home is not a change you can make overnight. It's a series of small changes you can make every day, and in every part of your home.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY MEANS:

- Getting the most use out of each unit of energy you purchase
- Using energy wisely
- Eliminating the ways your home wastes energy

MAKING YOUR HOME MORE EFFICIENT WILL:

- Make it more comfortable
- Make it safer
- Save you money



YOUR ENERGY BILL:

WHERE DOES THE MONEY GO?

Our energy bills don't come with a detailed receipt showing which appliances and systems use the most energy. But you can look for clues, like changes in your water or electric bill at different times of the year. By understanding how much energy your appliances should be using, you can figure out which systems are too costly and need to be replaced or adjusted. This tip book will make suggestions that can save you energy and money.

A LOOK AT WHERE THE AVERAGE HOME USES THE MOST ENERGY:

| | |
|--------------------|-------------|
| Space heating..... | 45% |
| Water heating..... | 18% |
| Space cooling..... | 9% |
| Lighting..... | 6% |
| Refrigeration..... | 4% |
| Wet cleaning..... | 3% |
| Electronics..... | 5% |
| Cooking..... | 4% |
| Computers..... | 2% |
| Other..... | 4% |
| TOTAL: | 100% |

Source: U.S. Department of Energy. *Buildings Energy Data Book*.



LIGHTING

Lowering your energy costs is easy when you switch to light-emitting diodes (LEDs). Start with the lights you use most often. Any light you use more than two hours per day is a good candidate for an LED bulb.

INSTEAD OF THIS:



USE THIS:



Why use LEDs?

- **LEDs make more light with less electricity.** An LED lightbulb uses only 9 watts to produce as much light as a 60-watt incandescent bulb.
- **LEDs last longer.** A 60-watt incandescent bulb usually lasts about 1,000 hours before burning out. LEDs can last 25,000 hours or more!
- **LEDs will save you money.** LEDs cost a little more, but they save so much electricity that they pay for themselves through energy savings. An LED bulb cuts energy use by 80% or more.



WHAT YOU CAN DO:

TURN OFF THE LIGHTS

Why? One 100-watt bulb left on overnight costs \$25 per year.

SHOP FOR SALES

Why? Stores often have sales on LED bulbs, especially during October, which is National Energy Action Month.

CHECK THE COLOR TEMPERATURE

Why? Lightbulbs can emit different colors of light. It's important to pick the color temperature that you like best. Lightbulbs are rated on the Kelvin temperature scale. 2000K is close to the warm glow of a candle and 6500K is the bright light of daylight. Lightbulb manufacturers separate lightbulbs into three categories: warm white, cool white, and daylight. Traditional incandescents are in the same Kelvin range as warm white bulbs.

BUY ENERGY STAR® LIGHT FIXTURES AND LAMPS

Why? They use one-quarter of the energy that traditional fixtures use.

KEEP LIGHTS CLEAN

Why? Dust can cut a bulb's light output by 25%.



The water heater is the **2nd**-largest energy user in most homes.

The water heater accounts for 18% of your energy bill, second only to your home's space-heating system, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

One reason for this is that we use a lot of water. Another reason is that we actually pay twice for hot water—once for the water itself and again for the cost of heating it.

Reducing the amount of hot water you use will save money on both bills.

TURN DOWN THE TEMPERATURE

Set the thermostat on your water heater to 120°F. It's one of the easiest ways to save. This change:

- **Saves energy.** Water is usually heated to 140°F; turning it down will save between 6% and 10% on your energy bill, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.
- **Prevents scalding** from extra-hot water.
- **Slows buildup** of minerals and corrosion in the water heater and in the pipes.

Leave your water heater thermostat at 140°F only if you have an older dishwasher with no booster heater. Consult your owner's manual or contact the manufacturer to find out if yours has a booster heater.

If you'll be on vacation, turn down the thermostat even further. If there's no risk of freezing, you can turn it off completely when you'll be away for several days.



WHAT YOU CAN DO:

INSTALL LOW-FLOW SHOWERHEADS

Why? They use one-third to one-half the water that regular showerheads use.

TURN DOWN THE WATER HEATER THERMOSTAT TO 120°F

Why? You will save money and save yourself from scalding accidents.

BUY A WATER HEATER THAT FITS YOUR NEEDS

Why? If you buy a new water heater that's too big, you'll pay to heat up water you don't need. That's a waste of both energy and money.

TAKE SHORT SHOWERS

Why? They use less hot water than baths.

FIX LEAKY WATER FAUCETS

Why? Thirty drops of water per minute can waste up to 50 gallons of water per month.

INSTALL LOW-FLOW AERATORS ON FAUCETS

Why? They reduce the amount of water that flows from your faucet, saving both water and energy.

LOOK FOR REBATES ON ENERGY STAR HEAT PUMP WATER HEATERS

Why? You may be able to reduce your costs by taking advantage of rebates.

LAUNDRY

Washing machines use two types of resources: electricity to power their motors and water to do their work.

Some machines are far more efficient at using these resources. To find the most efficient, look for the ENERGY STAR label. Conventional washers can use 40 gallons of water on just one load of laundry. But ENERGY STAR-rated washers can use fewer than 10 gallons of water. They use less energy, too.



ENERGY STAR WASHING MACHINES:

- **Cut utility bills** by an average of \$50 per year. That's a total of \$550 saved over 11 years, the average life span of a washing machine.
- **Save an average of 7,000 gallons of water** each year.
- **Come in two designs:** front-loading machines and redesigned top-loading machines. Neither has a central agitator.
- **Have a faster spin speed** to remove more water from your clothes. This helps clothes dry faster.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

WASH WITH COLD WATER, INSTEAD OF HOT

Why? Hot water is necessary only for very dirty laundry.

WASH AND DRY ONLY FULL LOADS

Why? The machines use roughly the same amount of water and energy to wash or dry one item as they do to wash or dry a full load.

SEPARATE FAST-DRYING AND SLOW-DRYING CLOTHES

Why? It helps you use the dryer only as long as you need to.

CLEAN THE LINT FILTER IN THE DRYER AFTER EVERY USE

Why? A clogged filter can prevent your dryer from doing its job.

DRY CLOTHES OUTSIDE IN GOOD WEATHER

Why? Sunlight is free.

CHOOSE ENERGY STAR WASHING MACHINES

Why? They use less than half the water and energy of standard machines.

USE THE HIGH-SPEED SPIN CYCLE OF YOUR WASHING MACHINE

Why? It extracts more water, so your laundry won't need to dry as long.

BUY A DRYER WITH AN AUTOMATIC SHUTOFF

Why? The dryer will sense when your clothes are dry and automatically turn off, saving energy.



KITCHEN

Kitchens are home to appliances that use a lot of electricity, like the fridge, and ones that use a lot of water, like the dishwasher.

We use several of these appliances every day, and using them as efficiently as possible will help your savings add up quickly!

REFRIGERATORS: A BIG PART OF YOUR ENERGY BILL

The fridge accounts for 4% of the average home's utility bill, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

TO SAVE ENERGY:

- Stick to the right temperature. Keep your fridge between 36°F and 38°F, and set your freezer between 0°F and 5°F.
- Keep the freezer full. It works more efficiently full than empty.
- Defrost manual-defrost models to keep them efficient.
- Unplug the second fridge, if you have one. It can cost between \$100 and \$200 a year to operate.
- Choose an ENERGY STAR model when buying a new fridge. It will be 15% more efficient than regular models.
- Check the door seals. If they're loose, replace them.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

USE YOUR DISHWASHER

Why? You can save 5,000 gallons of water each year and \$40 in utility costs by using a dishwasher instead of washing dishes by hand, according to ENERGY STAR.

WASH ONLY FULL LOADS OF DISHES

Why? It costs exactly the same to wash one dish as it does to wash a full load of dishes.

CHECK YOUR REFRIGERATOR TEMPERATURE

Why? You lose money if you keep it too cold. To check, put one thermometer in a glass of water in the center of the refrigerator and another between packages in the freezer. Read them after 24 hours. The temperature should be between 36°F and 38°F in the refrigerator and 0°F and 5°F in the freezer.

USE THE AIR-DRY OPTION ON DISHWASHERS

Why? It saves energy and keeps the machine from using a heating element to bake your dishes dry.

SCRAPE DISHES INSTEAD OF PRERINSING THEM

Why? Dishwashers made in the past 5 to 10 years can clean even heavily soiled dishes without prerinsing.

USE MICROWAVES AND SLOW COOKERS TO COOK SMALL MEALS

Why? They use less energy than the stove or oven.

KEEP THE INSIDE OF YOUR MICROWAVE CLEAN

Why? It improves the efficiency of your microwave.

USE LIDS WHEN YOU COOK

Why? They keep steam in and help food cook faster, which saves energy.



APPLIANCES

Each of your appliances has two price tags. The first is the price you pay for it at the store. The second is the price you pay to run it over its lifetime.

Over time, the cost of running your appliance will add up. Usually, this price is higher than the price you pay at the store.

Choosing the most energy-efficient appliances will help reduce operating costs. The yellow EnergyGuide label on the appliance will show you how much energy it will use. But also look for the ENERGY STAR symbol. It's only on appliances that meet strict energy-efficiency standards.

ENERGY STAR: A LABEL FOR SAVINGS

Products with the ENERGY STAR label meet strict energy-efficiency guidelines set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy.

Before you go to the store to buy a new appliance, see if the program certifies the type of machine you need. ENERGY STAR-certified products include:

- Clothes washers
- Clothes dryers
- Dehumidifiers
- Dishwashers
- Refrigerators
- DVD players
- Heating equipment
- Room air conditioners
- Home audio equipment
- Freezers
- Televisions
- Light fixtures
- Cooling equipment

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

ALWAYS BUY ENERGY STAR APPLIANCES

Why? They're more efficient than other appliances, and they'll cost less to operate.

THINK ABOUT CONFIGURATION

Why? It matters. Fridges with freezers on top are most efficient. Front-loading washers are more efficient than top-loading machines.

LOOK AT THE ENERGYGUIDE LABEL WHEN YOU'RE SHOPPING FOR AN APPLIANCE

Why? It will show the appliance's second price tag: its operating cost. It will also give comparisons to similar machines.

DON'T LOOK AT JUST ONE APPLIANCE

Why? It's better to compare how efficient different machines are than to look only at one option.

GET THE RIGHT SIZE

Why? Oversize appliances waste energy. Choose an extra-large dishwasher or fridge only if you have a large family that needs it.

LOOK FOR HIGH-EFFICIENCY FEATURES

Why? Things like soil-sensing detectors on dishwashers and automatic shutoffs on clothes dryers save energy and money.

RECYCLE OLD APPLIANCES

Why? It reduces waste. Fridges and other appliances can be used for scrap metal or other uses. Find a real recycling program, not one that resells inefficient secondhand machines.



Americans spend more money powering home entertainment systems, computers, and other electronics when they're off than when they're in use.

Living rooms are where most of the electronics in our homes can be found. We watch TV, turn on the computer, and pick up the phone from our living areas—and the costs add up, even when those electronics are off. In fact, Americans spend more money powering home entertainment systems, computers, and other electronics when they're off than when they're in use.

The living room is ripe for other energy-saving measures as well, especially if it has multiple windows, a fireplace, or several air vents.

POWER STRIPS: A SMART WAY TO SAVE

Your electronics can draw energy even while they're off—and that costs you money. Power strips help prevent this energy waste.

- **Plug electronics into a power strip.** Flip the switch off when you're not using the equipment.
- **If you have many electronics, group them** onto several power strips. Put things you use at the same time, such as the computer and printer, on the same strip.
- **Put power strips in easy-to-reach places.** They won't save energy if you don't use them regularly!
- **Don't put your TV on a power strip.** Many TVs need to be reprogrammed if they're completely turned off, making them a bad fit for power strips.
- **Make use of advanced or smart power strips.** They automatically turn off the power to certain appliances when not in use.



WHAT YOU CAN DO:

TURN OFF THE TV WHEN NO ONE IS WATCHING

Why? It's the easiest way to save.

USE THE SLEEP FUNCTION

Why? An average household can use 60% less energy to power electronics just by using the sleep mode.

UNPLUG POWER ADAPTERS AND CHARGERS

Why? When cell phones, digital cameras, or laptops are done charging, the charger still draws energy unless you unplug it.

CHECK YOUR AIR VENTS AND REGISTERS

Why? If they're blocked by furniture or drapes, the air you pay to heat or cool won't reach the rest of the room.

CONSIDER YOUR WINDOW COVERINGS

Why? They should be closed during the day in summer to keep the heat out and open during the day in winter to let sunlight warm your home.

SHUT THE FLUE ON YOUR FIREPLACE

Why? An open flue lets air escape from your home, wasting energy. If you never use the fireplace, have it sealed up permanently.

WEATHER-STRIP WINDOWS

Why? Windows are a common location for air leaks. Seal them up with weather stripping or caulk for a more efficient home.



YARD

In some areas, watering the yard can account for **50%** of a home's total water use in summer months.

When it comes to the outdoors, most families like to use a lot of water—for the lawn, the garden, and even washing the car.

Learning to use less water outside makes a big impact on your bills. You can save tens of thousands of gallons by taking simple steps, such as selecting a better watering system and not mowing too often.

WATCH THAT SPRINKLER

Sprinklers can use more than 260 gallons of water per hour—and the bills add up quickly.

TO SAVE WATER:

- **Check your aim.** The sprinkler should water your lawn, not a nearby yard or sidewalk.
- **Use a drip hose instead of a sprinkler,** if possible. Sprinklers spray water onto the tops of plants, where it evaporates. Drip hoses deliver water to a plant's roots.
- **Water early in the morning or late at night,** when temperatures are lower.
- **Check the forecast.** Never water when it's going to rain.
- **Install an automatic shutoff device** if you have an irrigation system.



WHAT YOU CAN DO:

LET YOUR GRASS GROW

Why? Taller grass loses less water to evaporation than short grass. Mowing too frequently means your yard will need more water.

USE A SHUTOFF NOZZLE WHEN WATERING

Why? It saves water when you use a hose to water plants.

PLANT TREES THAT LOSE LEAVES ON YOUR HOME'S SOUTH SIDE

Why? Deciduous trees will protect your home from the summer sun, and then after the leaves fall they'll let the winter sun help heat your home.

RETHINK YOUR OUTDOOR LIGHTS

Why? You'll save energy by switching to efficient outdoor lights. Also consider installing a motion sensor to increase security and savings.

DON'T HOSE DOWN THE DRIVEWAY, GARAGE, OR SIDEWALK

Why? Using a broom instead saves water.

CHOOSE DROUGHT-RESISTANT PLANTS

Why? If maintained properly, a landscape of drought-resistant and native plants will use less than half the water of a traditional yard.

USE A BUCKET OF WATER TO WASH A CAR

Why? It uses less water than a hose.



HEATING

Heating your home accounts for 45% of an average home's energy bill—the single biggest energy expense in your home.

Most homes have a furnace or boiler to power the heating system. These systems are regulated by a thermostat, which tells the system how much energy to use—and controls the temperature of your home.

Set your thermostat at 68°F in the winter and 78°F in the summer to save energy.

Consider replacing an old furnace, especially if yours is more than 15 years old. New high-efficiency furnaces are far more efficient than older models. Consider purchasing a heat pump for dependable and efficient heating. Cold-climate heat pumps are now available as well.

PROGRAMMABLE THERMOSTATS

Programmable thermostats automatically adjust your home's temperature to maximize your savings by turning down the heat while you're away during the day and while you sleep at night.

Used properly, a programmable thermostat can save up to \$150 a year, according to ENERGY STAR.

If you use a programmable thermostat, make a schedule and stick to it. Program it to lower the heat two hours before you go to bed and increase it just before you wake. Lower the heat during the day if no one will be home for four or more hours. This doesn't apply to heat pumps, which operate most efficiently when they stay at a consistent temperature.

The thermostat will let you change the schedule. But don't do this too frequently or you won't save as much money as you should.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

TURN THE THERMOSTAT DOWN 5°F

Why? Turning it down one degree saves about 2% on your heating bill. Turning it down five degrees saves about 10%. Install a programmable thermostat for gas or oil heating and it will do the work for you.

HAVE A PROFESSIONAL INSPECT AND TUNE UP YOUR FURNACE

Why? Oil-burning furnaces should be checked every year. Gas-burning ones should be checked every two years.

IF YOU USE A SPACE HEATER, BE SAFE!

Why? Old or improperly used space heaters can be very dangerous. Make sure yours meets the latest safety standards, turn it off when you sleep, and use it only in an open area.

CHECK FILTERS

Why? Forced-air furnaces and heat pumps have filters that need to be cleaned or replaced monthly.

CHECK AIR VENTS, RADIATORS, AND REGISTERS

Why? If they're blocked by furniture or drapes, heat won't get into the rest of your home.

CLEAN THE AREA AROUND YOUR FURNACE

Why? It decreases the chance of fire and improves airflow.

WEAR A SWEATER INSTEAD OF TURNING UP THE HEAT

Why? Turning up your thermostat decreases your savings.

NEVER USE THE KITCHEN STOVE TO HEAT YOUR HOME

Why? It's very dangerous! Stoves aren't designed for heating large areas: doing so lets toxic chemicals into your home and is a fire hazard.

CONSIDER THE NEEDS OF EVERYONE WHO LIVES IN YOUR HOME

Why? Elderly people and people with medical conditions can have greater heating needs—and should adjust their thermostat to meet them.



COOLING

Cooling your home is just as important as heating it—and the cost can be nearly as high in some parts of the country.

Before you turn on the air conditioner, reduce your need for cooling. Use fans and natural ventilation first. Turn on the air conditioner only if these measures aren't enough. Make sure your air conditioner is running as efficiently as possible, too.

SIZE MATTERS

When you buy a new air conditioner, make sure to get one that's the right size for your home. Don't base the size of a new system on the size of an old one—it could have been the wrong size.

If you buy one that's too big, it won't remove the humidity from your home and it will turn on and off more frequently than a system of the proper size. This increases wear and shortens its life span.

If you buy one that's too small, it won't be able to cool your home enough on the hottest days of summer.

For a central air-conditioning system, your contractor should base the new equipment on the amount of heat your home gains during the summer, which he or she can calculate with specialized software.

For room air conditioners, check EnergyStar.gov for sizing recommendations. ENERGY STAR suggests a 14,000 BTU model, for example, for a space of 550 to 700 square feet.



WHAT YOU CAN DO:

CLEAN FILTERS MONTHLY

Why? Dirty or clogged filters block airflow and reduce efficiency.

USE A FAN FIRST

Why? Fans don't use as much energy as air conditioners, and they are effective.

INSTALL ROOM AIR CONDITIONERS CORRECTLY

Why? If the unit isn't installed tightly, cooled air will escape from your home.

PLACE YOUR ROOM AIR CONDITIONER PROPERLY

Why? If the thermostat of your unit is near electronics or appliances that produce heat, it will read higher than it should. Put the unit in a shaded window where it won't be heated by sunlight.

SET THE THERMOSTAT AT 78°F IN SUMMER

Why? The smaller the difference between the inside and outside temperatures, the lower your cooling bill will be.

CHOOSE NEW WINDOWS WITH A LOW-E COATING

Why? Much of your home's heat enters through the windows. Low-E helps block that heat. Also look for ENERGY STAR-rated windows.



Heating and cooling account for more than **50%** of the average energy bill, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

Heating and cooling needs vary by season, but the same tactics apply. A tightly sealed home keeps the air you heat or cool inside and the outdoor air outside.

If you plan to live in your home for a long time, think about planting trees that will lose their leaves every fall on the west and south sides of your house. In the summer they'll shade your home from the sun, and then in the winter they'll let the sun heat your home.

CHOOSE ENERGY-EFFICIENT SYSTEMS

The easiest way to find an efficient heating or cooling system is to look for the ENERGY STAR label. But there are also a few other indicators of how efficient a system is.

For furnaces or boilers, look for a high annual fuel utilization efficiency (AFUE), which is a ratio of how much heat the machine creates compared to the amount of energy it consumes. The higher the AFUE, the more efficient the system.

For central air conditioners, look for a seasonal energy efficiency rating (SEER) of 14.5 or higher. This is the cooling output divided by the power input. The higher the number, the more efficient the air conditioner.

For room air conditioners, look for a high combined energy efficiency ratio (CEER), which is the cooling output divided by the power input. Choose a unit with a CEER of 10.8 or higher. The higher the CEER, the more efficient the machine is. ENERGY STAR models save the most energy.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

In the Summer

USE FANS

Why? They use less energy than air conditioners and can be very effective.

USE CEILING FANS

Why? They're more effective than other fans. Running a ceiling fan will allow you to set the thermostat four degrees higher with no noticeable change in comfort.

CLOSE SHADES AND WINDOWS DURING THE DAY

Why? It keeps out sunlight and heat. Open them at night to help ventilate your home.

SET THE THERMOSTAT AT 78°F

Why? It helps save energy. Use a fan before turning down the air conditioner.

In the Winter

KEEP DRAPES OPEN DURING THE DAY

Why? It lets the sunlight heat your home. Close them at night to keep the heat in.

REPAIR WINDOWS

Why? Cracks in windows let cold air into your home, driving up your energy bills. Install weather stripping if your window is loose.

INSTALL STORM WINDOWS

Why? They pay for themselves by keeping out cold air and preventing moisture from collecting on the windows.

USE TIMERS INSTEAD OF LEAVING LIGHTS ON

Why? If you don't like coming home to a dark house in the short days of winter, save energy by using timers, motion detectors, and daylight sensors.



Sealing and insulating your home can reduce your heating and cooling costs by as much as 30%, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

Heat naturally flows from warm areas to cool ones. If your home isn't well sealed, the air you pay to heat and cool can flow right out of your home.

Several areas are prone to air leaks: the attic, basement, windows, doors, baseboard moldings, electrical outlets, wall- or window-mounted air conditioners, and dropped ceilings above bathtubs and cabinets.

HOW TO FIND AIR LEAKS

A home's biggest air leaks are usually in big areas, such as the basement or attic. But small leaks also add up.

To find air leaks, look for daylight around the frames of windows and doors. If you see light, there's an air leak.

You can also light a stick of incense and use it to locate leaks. Hold it in areas you think are drafty. Moving air makes the smoke waver, showing you where there's an air leak. Or you can also put water on your hand and hold your hand near potential air leaks; the water will make you more sensitive to cool air.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

CAULK CRACKS AND GAPS LESS THAN ¼ INCH WIDE
Why? Caulk is flexible and a good way to seal air leaks. Apply it when the outdoor air temperature is above 45°F and not very humid, or the caulk may not dry properly.

WEATHER-STRIP DOORS AND WINDOWS
Why? It's an easy way to seal leaks. Compression and V-strip weather stripping are good for windows. For doors, either replace the threshold or attach a door sweep to seal the air gap at the bottom of the door.

USE INSULATING BLINDS, SHADES, OR CURTAINS
Why? Windows are a frequent source of air leaks. Interior window quilts or cellular shades can reduce the draft and increase the insulation when they're drawn closed.

FIND PROGRAMS IN YOUR AREA
Why? The Weatherization Assistance Program helps low-income families across the United States insulate and weatherize their homes. State energy offices and utility companies also frequently offer programs.

INSULATE YOUR WATER HEATER TANK
Why? If your water heater uses a tank, it can easily lose heat through the walls of the tank.

KNOW HOW MUCH INSULATION YOU HAVE
Why? Only 20% of homes built before 1980 are well insulated, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

SCHEDULE A BLOWER DOOR TEST WITH AN ENERGY AUDITOR
Why? Blower door tests measure how airtight a home is. An energy auditor can assess energy efficiency and make recommendations for improvements.



Every year, more than 25,000 residential fires are associated with the use of space heaters, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

Your home uses energy in many places and for many machines—and you must take care to operate each of them as safely as possible.

Decreasing your energy use means making changes throughout your home. Make each change as safely as possible and install some additional safety features, such as carbon monoxide alarms, to keep your family safe at home.

SPACE HEATERS: SAFETY FIRST!

Every year, fires and carbon monoxide poisonings are caused by space heaters. More than 300 people die in these fires. Each year 6,000 people are treated at emergency rooms for burns associated with space heaters, mostly in nonfire situations.

It's important to buy the safest space heater possible and always think about safety while using it.

MAKE SURE YOUR SPACE HEATER:

- Meets the latest safety standards. These standards were recently updated for greater safety.
- Is used only in an open area. Air needs to circulate around the space heater. Use it only on level, hard, nonflammable surfaces.
- Is at least three feet away from flammable items. Any closer is a big fire danger!
- Is not an unvented gas or kerosene heater. These are very dangerous. If you do have one, always keep the doors open when you use it to keep pollutants from building up.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

BUY SMOKE DETECTORS

Why? You should have one on every level of your house and one outside each sleeping area. Replace the batteries twice each year.

GET A CARBON MONOXIDE ALARM

Why? This odorless gas is deadly and can be produced by defective heaters.

KNOW THE SYMPTOMS OF CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING

Why? It's deadly. Symptoms include dizziness, headache, nausea, irregular breathing, and confusion. If you think you have the flu but feel better when you leave the house, carbon monoxide could be the culprit.

NEVER LEAVE AN ENGINE RUNNING IN AN ATTACHED GARAGE

Why? The fumes can be toxic. Never leave a snowblower, lawn mower, car, or anything else with an engine running in the garage—even if the door is open!

KEEP THE AREA AROUND YOUR FURNACE CLEAR

Why? The furnace needs air to do its job. Never store anything flammable near your furnace—it's a fire hazard.

OPEN WINDOWS AND USE FANS AROUND CHEMICALS

Why? Not ventilating your home or garage when you're using chemicals can cause health problems.

NEVER INSERT METAL OBJECTS INTO AN APPLIANCE

Why? Doing this—putting a knife in a toaster, for example—puts you at risk of being shocked. Unplug the appliance first.





Energy savings vary by region and by family. The following is a list of key sources used in preparing this book:

The American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy
www.aceee.org

The U.S. Department of Energy
www.energy.gov

The U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy
www.eere.energy.gov

ENERGY STAR®, a joint program of the U.S. Department of Energy and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
www.energystar.gov

Alliance to Save Energy
www.ase.org

For more information about The Education & Outreach Company, visit www.educationandoutreach.com

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ENERGY BUDGETING

UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING ENERGY EXPENSES



**CONTRA COSTA COUNTY
COMMUNITY SERVICES BUREAU**

**Low Income Home Energy
Assistance Program (LIHEAP)**

Ph: 925-655-0960 Fx: 925-229-6784

Weatherization Program

Ph: 925-655-2714 Fx: 925-655-3005

ENERGY AS A PART OF YOUR BUDGET

A home, whether you own it or rent it, requires a financial commitment. That commitment includes the bills you pay every month for the energy you consume at home. It also includes the energy systems in your home and their maintenance, repair, and improvement.

All of those have costs, whether they're for monthly utility service or one-time improvements that might lower your monthly bills over the long term. Understanding the different types of energy expenses and how they work together is key to budgeting effectively and ultimately saving money on energy.

To begin to understand energy's role in your budget, look at five key areas:

Past energy use: Obtain past utility bills, preferably from the last 12–24 months. This will give you a good idea of your monthly and seasonal use patterns. It will also give you a ballpark figure to set aside each month.

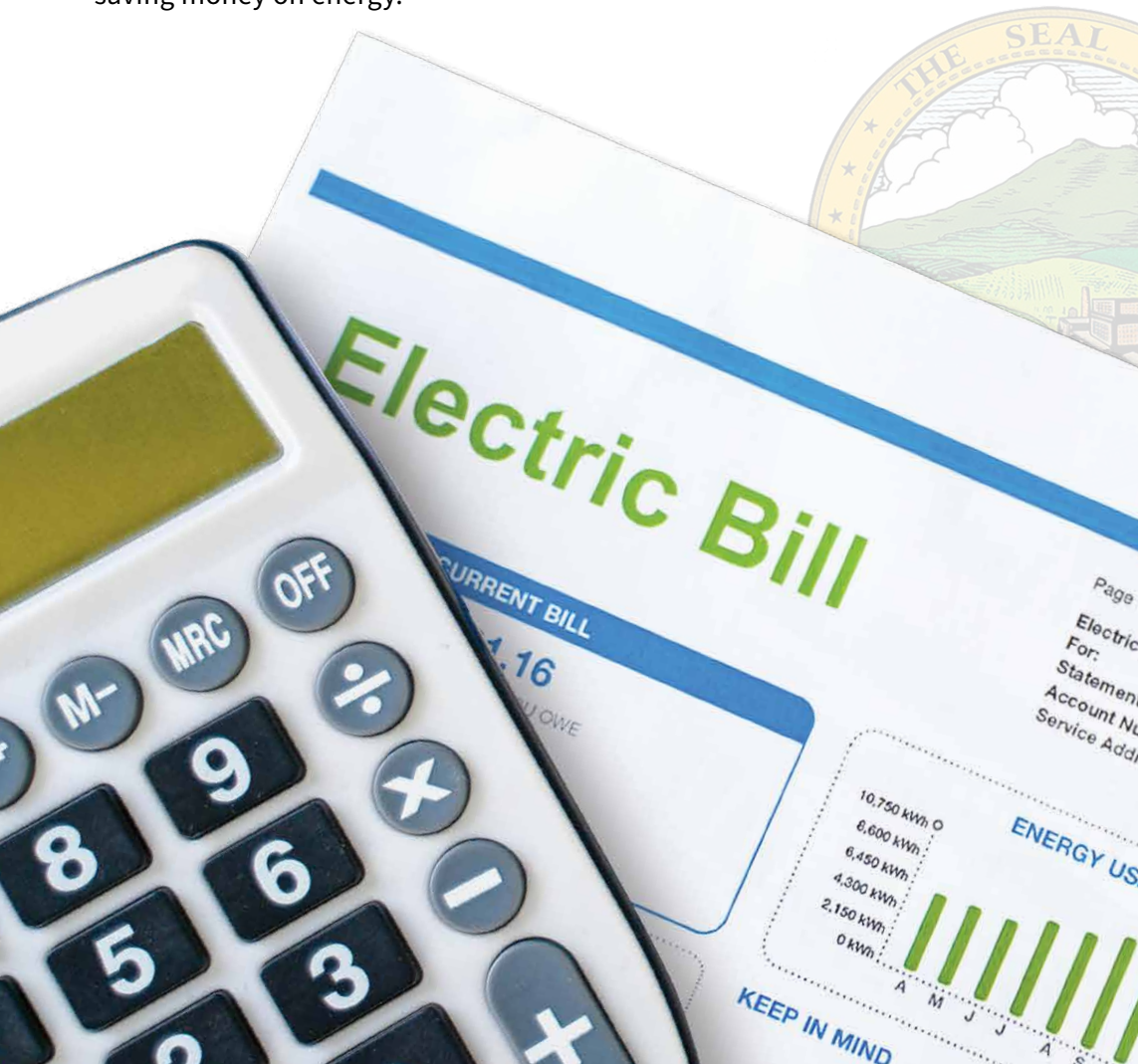
Forecasting: Account for changes that might affect your energy consumption. For example, if you've recently bought a new appliance or if someone has moved into or out of your home, your consumption may change. Keep an eye on energy rate announcements from your provider.

Monitor your bill: Regularly check your utility bills to ensure that your budgeted amounts align with your actual costs. If you notice consistent discrepancies, adjust your budget accordingly. Review your energy costs at least semiannually to account for any significant changes in rates or usage.

Increasing efficiency: Making your home energy efficient can go a long way toward lowering energy bills, but it's not something you can do in a day. It's a series of changes—some small, some large—that you make over time to increase your home's efficiency. An efficient home is one that uses the energy you pay for with as little waste as possible. This means you're not spending money for energy to run your home that leaks out because of poor insulation, air leaks, or other inefficiencies. Budgeting for efficiency projects to lower your expected monthly bills should be part of your energy budgeting.

Staying informed: Stay up to date on energy-saving tips, programs, or incentives offered by your local utility company, government, or other organizations.

Preparing for energy costs requires a mix of proactive measures to reduce consumption and diligent budgeting based on usage and predictions of future usage. As you consistently monitor and adjust, you'll get a better handle on managing these costs effectively.



PAYING YOUR BILL

Receiving and paying your utility bill is the most regular interaction you have with energy as a part of your household budget. The bill is a vital source of information about what you use and what it costs. How you pay your bill can save on fees and possibly make the monthly payments less of a burden.

- **Pay your bill on time:** Avoid late fees and the stress of payment notices by paying on time. If you can't pay on time, contact your utility to find out if payment plans or other programs exist and could help you. For more information on what to do if you're struggling to pay your bill, see page 19.
- **Read your bill:** Utility bills contain useful information about usage, rebates, and other utility programs. Understanding how your energy use changes by season can help inform decisions about household improvements. An unexpectedly high bill might be a warning sign that an appliance is on the wrong settings or malfunctioning.
- **Set up automatic payments:** Signing up for automatic payment will reduce the likelihood of a missed utility bill payment. Be sure to update your account if you change credit cards or bank account numbers. And even though payment is automatic, it's still important to read your bill.
- **Take note of processing fees:** When setting up online payments, look to see what fees, if any, are associated with different forms of online payment.
- **Avoid overdraft charges:** If you set up automatic payments with a bank account, ensure that your balance is sufficient to cover the bill so you won't have to pay overdraft charges.



BALANCED BILLING

Balanced billing, also known as budget billing or leveled billing, is a payment system offered by many utility companies to help customers manage their monthly bills. The objective is to smooth out payments over the course of the year and avoid high bills in winter or summer so customers can better budget their expenses. Here's how it generally works:

- 1. Estimation of energy consumption:** The utility company estimates a customer's usage based on past consumption data, usually from the previous 12 months. The estimated annual consumption can be divided by 12 to get the monthly average.
- 2. Consistent monthly payments:** Instead of paying for actual usage each month, the customer pays this calculated average. So, during months when consumption is below average, the customer will overpay, while in months when consumption is above average, the customer will underpay. But over the course of a year, these differences should roughly cancel out.
- 3. Periodic review and adjustment:** Utility companies periodically review each customer's actual usage versus the usage paid for under balanced billing. This is typically done annually. If a customer has overpaid or underpaid relative to their actual usage, an adjustment is made. If the customer has overpaid, the excess might be credited to the account or deducted from future balanced bills. If the customer has underpaid, they owe the utility company the difference; this balance could be rolled into the next year's monthly average, or the utility might request a one-time payment.
- 4. End of agreement or opt-out:** If a customer ends their balanced billing agreement or switches utility providers, any balance due or credit owed will typically be settled on the final bill.
- 5. Potential disadvantages:** Customers might end up owing the utility company money if their actual usage far exceeds the estimate. It's important to plan for potential underpayment if they install new appliances or their energy use pattern changes. Additionally, because customers pay an average, they might not see the immediate cost-saving results of conservation efforts.

If you're using balanced billing, it's important to review your actual consumption and costs monthly to ensure you're not significantly overpaying or underpaying.



UNDERSTANDING WHAT IT COSTS TO RUN YOUR HOME

Your energy bill doesn't come with a tidy receipt listing how much energy each appliance in your home uses. It takes some work to find the biggest energy guzzlers in your home—and then more work to fix them. It helps to understand where your home uses the most energy.

AN ENERGY AUDIT

Getting an energy audit is the best way to understand how your home uses energy and where inefficiencies are so you can improve your home and save money on energy. Utility and government energy audit programs exist—check to see if you qualify for a subsidized or free audit.

So, what happens during an energy audit? An energy auditor searches your entire home for escaping energy. Using advanced equipment and techniques, they search inside and out for inefficiencies and safety concerns. Then they provide a customized, detailed, written account of your home's energy efficiency that shows where the most energy escapes and what repairs can be made to maximize savings. When you discuss the results with your auditor, they help you make plans to complete the work and show you ways to improve efficiency on your own.

A thorough energy audit will help you understand which energy improvements will pay for themselves and where the biggest issues are. In the end, you'll know exactly where energy is escaping and what you can do to fix it. This will save you money, improve comfort and safety, and increase the overall value of your home, all while reducing your energy footprint.

COMMON AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Air leaks due to cracks, crevasses, and bypasses: Air leaks are the most common cause of energy inefficiency. They are usually found near and around doors, windows, corners, joints, connections to home additions, electric outlets, vents, or recessed lighting. Your auditor will help you find all significant leaks and include a detailed list on the final report. The goal is to get your home as airtight as possible while still allowing controlled and gradual air exchange with the outside.

Insulation: Ineffective or insufficient insulation is another very common problem. The auditor will check the insulation of the attic, walls, floor, basement, and crawl space. For homes in cold areas, the attic is likely the most important area of focus. Since heat rises, this is where most energy escapes during the winter. For the attic to be sufficiently insulated, a thick and even layer of insulation is needed in every spot. If insulation is too thin, damaged, or missing in some areas, heat will escape.

Venting system: All homes have venting systems that remove moisture and maintain a healthy cycle of air. This controlled air exchange is crucial not only to your comfort but also to your safety. Blocked or damaged venting systems can lead to moisture problems, mold, and even the buildup of dangerous toxins. The opposite is also a problem: a vent that allows too much air to leak in can cause energy wastage and moisture problems. During the inspection, the auditor will check your home to make sure neither is happening.

PLANNING MAINTENANCE

In most instances, it's more expensive to replace energy-using appliances in an emergency than after thoughtful planning. The contractor may not have the most efficient and affordable appliances on hand. It might take a few days to get approval for the best financing option. However, if your furnace goes out in the middle of winter, you may not have a choice about replacing it right away.

- **Ensure that major appliances are maintained:** Schedule regular maintenance with a licensed contractor. This will increase efficiency and the life of your appliance.
- **Track the age of your appliances:** Make a list of each piece of HVAC equipment and your hot water heater, refrigerator, and other major appliances. Note the year they were installed and their maintenance schedule. As they near the end of their useful life, begin planning for their replacement. Look for utility and government programs that will subsidize energy-efficient upgrades.
- **Take note of energy usage:** Some older appliances use significantly more energy than newer versions. Others don't and should be replaced only when necessary. Calculate whether a new model would pay for itself.

DEMAND-RESPONSE PROGRAMS

Everyone wants to use large amounts of electricity at the same time, especially when it's hot outside and air conditioners are running full blast. To ensure enough power for everyone, utilities have introduced demand-response programs that incentivize customers to use less electricity during peak times. There are various ways to save on electricity bills as part of demand-response programs. Some places create incentives to use electricity at night when demand is lower. Others have programs where consumers can sign up to have utilities turn down their air conditioner or cycle hot water heaters powered by smart plugs and thermostats. Participating in these programs can reduce energy bills or provide other financial incentives.

EVALUATING SAVINGS

Average savings might not apply to your situation. Understanding how you use energy and whether you will realize the advertised savings is important in determining what makes sense for your home. In some cases, you might find you have additional savings. Here are a few key areas to look at when determining what your actual savings will be:

- **Calculating average savings:** How did the company calculate average savings? Does that method apply to your climate or energy prices?
- **Your energy usage:** Do you use enough energy to realize the average savings? If the answer is no, is that because the cost of energy causes you to heat or cool less of the home? Would a more efficient appliance produce greater comfort even if energy prices are the same?
- **Differential costs:** Are the savings calculated on the basis of replacing an existing unit or, alternatively, buying a less-efficient model versus a more-efficient model? Some of the savings that make financial sense if the calculation would be done regardless of existing equipment don't make sense if the existing equipment still works.
- **Health benefits:** Does someone in your household have a medical condition that would benefit from an energy improvement? For example, backup power for someone in a vulnerable population who requires a medical device or better heating might not save on the energy bill, but it might instead reduce the number of hospital visits.
- **Moving:** How long are you planning to live in your home? Ensuring that improvements have payback periods that align with your plans is important.





FINANCING HOME IMPROVEMENTS

Some energy improvements are expensive enough that you may need to or choose to finance them. In an emergency, such as a furnace needing to be replaced in winter, there isn't a lot of time to evaluate options. Understanding what's out there and what the financing means for your budget can save you money over the long term.

GRANTS, INCENTIVES, AND OTHER PROGRAMS

Many programs to support energy upgrades are available. On page 12, this tip book discusses how to look for them.

SECURED VS. UNSECURED

A loan is either secured or unsecured. "Secured" means that if you default on the loan, the lending institution has the right to seize the asset you purchased with the loan proceeds. "Unsecured" means that the lender can't seize the asset immediately if you default, but there can still be consequences for your credit rating and ability to get loans in the future. In addition, the lender can go to court to seek a judgment against you and seek to garnish wages, seize assets, or put a lien against your home.

OVERALL COST

Financing offered on energy upgrades can be structured in many ways. It's important to understand the up-front payments, periodic payments, and payments at the end of the loan. A loan with a low initial payment might have increasingly higher subsequent payments compared to one with even payments across the term of the loan. Be sure you understand whether, during the term of the loan, the interest rate will step up to a higher rate. In general, assess the effect of financing terms on the overall cost of the improvement.

SPECIAL FINANCING PROGRAMS

Some programs are designed to allow you to creatively pay for energy improvements with less impact on your budget. For example, on-bill finance is a program where the utility arranges financing for energy improvements and you pay the loan back through your utility bill. For more information on these financing programs, see page 15.

CREDIT CARDS

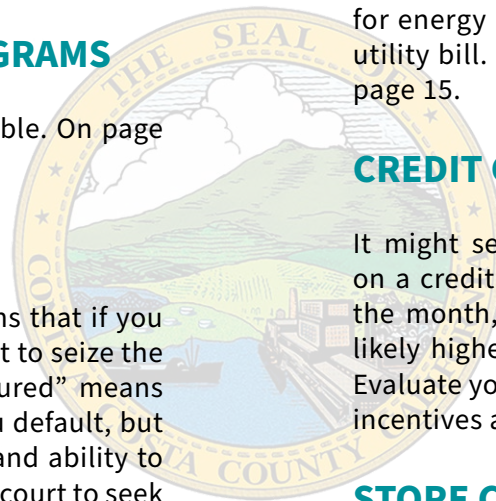
It might seem easiest to put an emergency energy improvement on a credit card. But if you can't pay off the balance at the end of the month, you'll probably pay more, because the interest rate is likely higher than on many of the other finance options available. Evaluate your credit card interest rates compared to the options and incentives available.

STORE CREDIT CARDS

Appliance stores often offer dedicated credit cards with attractive rates if balances are paid off in a designated amount of time. With any credit card option, it's important to know the costs if you pay off the cost of the improvement on schedule and the penalties or higher interest rates if you don't.

CREDIT REPORT

With any financing option, the potential creditor will likely pull your credit report to check your FICO score.



FINDING INCENTIVES AND GRANTS

Investigating energy rebates and incentives can result in significant savings for consumers when they make energy-efficient improvements to their homes. Here's a step-by-step guide to help you search for incentives:

- **Start with your utility company:** Most utility companies offer rebates or discounts for energy-efficient appliances, home audits, or other energy-saving measures. Check their website or contact their customer service department for information on current offers.
- **State and local government programs:** Many states and local governments have programs or incentives designed to reduce energy consumption. Check the websites of your state's energy department, your city or county, and local energy nonprofits.
- **Low-income programs:** The federal government has created two programs, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program to assist in paying energy bills and the Weatherization Assistance Program to make energy-efficient improvements accessible. Check to find out if you qualify for either program (more information on page 18).
- **Visit retailers that sell energy-related appliances:** Sometimes, retailers that sell energy-efficient appliances or products have information on current rebates or incentives. They may even offer in-store promotions.
- **Consult an energy auditor:** Consider having a professional energy audit of your home. An auditor can identify areas where energy efficiency can be improved and may be aware of specific rebates or incentives that apply to recommended upgrades.
- **Stay up to date:** Energy rebates and incentives can change annually, so it's important to stay up to date. Set a reminder to check annually or biannually.
- **Understand the application process:** Once you identify a rebate or incentive, make sure you understand the application process. There might be forms to fill out, proof of purchase required, and specific deadlines to meet. Some rebates or incentives might require preapproval before the purchase or installation of a product.

- **Life-supporting and lifesaving equipment:** If you have medical equipment that requires power, there may be grants and incentives for energy upgrades and especially the installation of backup power sources in your home.

Remember, while rebates and incentives can reduce the up-front cost of energy-efficient upgrades, the real savings come over time in the form of lower utility bills. Ensure you're considering both the immediate and long-term benefits as you evaluate potential projects for your home.

DOING YOUR DUE DILIGENCE

In addition to doing the math on incentives and financing upgrades, you need to do your homework on the work being done, the equipment being installed, and how it will affect your energy budget. A poorly installed energy-efficiency upgrade might not generate the same savings as one installed properly.

- **Get quotes:** Get multiple quotes to find the best price for your energy improvement.
- **Research your contractor:** The person installing energy appliances might do work that affects your electrical system, your plumbing, and the air flow in your home. Ensure they're licensed to do the work and research reviews of their work. You might also consider calling their references.
- **Consumer protections:** Every state has consumer protection laws. It's important to research yours and understand what your contractor, installer, or finance partner is required to do.
- **Read the fine print:** What warranties are being made on the work or appliances? Is a service plan included, or will service be an expense you'll incur in the future?
- **Equipment:** Is the energy equipment being installed easy to have repaired with multiple contractors able to bid on the work, or does it require special parts that need to be ordered?
- **Moving:** If the work or appliance is being financed, what happens if you move? What are your cancellation rights?

WHAT TO DO IF THERE IS A PROBLEM

Licensed contractors install, maintain, and repair the systems that allow us to lead our daily lives. They do incredibly important work, and most jobs go well. But what happens when something goes wrong or you're the target of misleading claims?

- **Contact the contractor:** Repairs may be covered under the warranty, their insurance, or simply their desire to maintain their reputation in the community.
- **Contact the Better Business Bureau (BBB):** The BBB maintains a database of companies across the country and handles complaints on behalf of consumers.
- **If you've been scammed:** look into filing a complaint with your state Attorney General's office.
- **Warranty of habitability:** If you're a renter, your landlord may be required to provide a safe, clean living space under what's called a warranty of habitability. Research the rules in your state.



OTHER TYPES OF ENERGY FINANCING

There are many types of financing designed to make energy efficiency and renewable energy installation affordable for homeowners. With any of them, it's important to do the following:

- Compare all costs over the term of any agreement or loan.
- Understand potential tax implications or benefits.
- Consider potential future scenarios, such as selling your home.
- Consult with a financial advisor or tax professional.
- Look into local and federal tax credits, rebates, and incentives, which can significantly reduce the effective cost of the system.

ON-BILL FINANCING

- **How it works:** The loan for the improvements is tied directly to the property's utility bill. Ideally, the monetary savings realized from energy efficiency will equal or exceed the monthly loan repayment amount, resulting in net savings or a net-zero cost for the homeowner.
- **Benefits:** With on-bill financing, the loan repayment for the energy improvements appears as a separate line item on the homeowner's regular utility bill. The loan is often tied to the property meter, not the individual. This means that if the property is sold, the loan can sometimes stay with the utility meter and be passed on to the next owner.
- **Considerations:** It's important to be sure that savings will be enough to cover the costs of the loan or, if they're not, budget for the extra expense.

SOLAR LOANS

- **How they work:** Like other home improvement loans, solar loans can be secured or unsecured. The homeowner borrows money to pay for the solar system and repays the loan over time with interest.
- **Benefits:** The owner of the system may be entitled to tax credits and other incentives. Many solar loans have competitive interest rates.
- **Considerations:** It's crucial to review and compare loan terms, interest rates, and monthly payments to ensure you're getting a good deal.

SOLAR POWER PURCHASE AGREEMENTS (PPAS)

- **How they work:** A third party installs, owns, and maintains the solar system on the homeowner's property. The homeowner agrees to purchase the electricity generated by the system at a set rate, which is typically lower than the utility's rate.
- **Benefits:** There are no up-front costs, and maintenance is the responsibility of the third party.
- **Considerations:** The homeowner doesn't own the system, and contracts are typically long-term (15–25 years).

SOLAR LEASE

- **How it works:** The homeowner leases solar equipment from a third-party provider for a monthly fee. A solar lease is similar to a PPA, but the homeowner pays for the equipment use, not the electricity produced.
- **Benefits:** Often, there's little to no up-front cost. Electricity rates are lower, and maintenance is typically covered by the leasing company.
- **Considerations:** The homeowner doesn't own the system and may need to sign a long-term contract. This option might not be as financially beneficial as others in the long run.

PROPERTY ASSESSED CLEAN ENERGY (PACE) FINANCING

- **How it works:** The cost of the solar system is added to the homeowner's property tax bill and paid off over time. The debt is tied to the property, not the individual.
- **Benefits:** There are no up-front costs or long repayment terms, and sometimes interest is tax deductible.
- **Considerations:** PACE financing is not available everywhere. It increases the property tax bill, and if the improvements don't create enough savings to pay for themselves, the property tax bill could be burdensome. Property tax delinquency can lead to foreclosure on a home, so be sure any increase is one you can afford, even if the system doesn't produce the anticipated savings.

ENERGY-EFFICIENT MORTGAGES (EEMS)

- **How they work:** An EEM allows homeowners to include energy-efficient improvements, such as solar installations, in their mortgage.
- **Benefits:** EEMs offer the opportunity to finance a solar system as part of a home purchase or refinance.
- **Considerations:** Qualifying might be subject to specific requirements or conditions.

COMMUNITY SOLAR

- **How it works:** A solar power installation is used by multiple people to receive credits on their electricity bills. It allows homeowners who might not have the means, suitable location, or desire to install solar panels on their own property to benefit from solar power.
- **Benefits:** Participants receive credits on their utility bills corresponding to the amount of solar power their share of the project has produced. This process is often referred to as virtual net metering. Essentially, even though the solar panels aren't on the homeowner's property, the homeowner benefits from the electricity those panels produce.
- **Considerations:** Most community solar subscriptions or purchase agreements have a set duration, often ranging from 10 to 25 years. It's essential to understand the terms and any early-exit fees or conditions.

ENERGY SERVICE AGREEMENTS

- **How they work:** The energy service company will put together an energy retrofit package and finance the work in exchange for a long-term service agreement. In most cases, you will pay that company for your utility service and it will earn its money back through the savings.
- **Benefits:** You can finance improvements without a loan or lease.
- **Considerations:** Service agreements can be as long as 20 years. You need to understand what will happen if you move before the end of the agreement.





ENERGY ASSISTANCE

Energy bills can be a burden on families during the coldest months of winter and the hottest months of summer. Turning off the heat or air conditioning can create real health and safety risks. To help people get through the toughest months of the year, two federal programs provide assistance with home energy costs: the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP).

LIHEAP is a federal program known by different names in different states, such as LIEAP, LEAP, HEAP, or EAP. If you qualify, LIHEAP can help you pay your heating and, in some cases, cooling bill. All fuel sources are eligible, including electricity, natural gas, heating oil, kerosene, propane, wood, coal, and sometimes renewable energy such as wind, hydroelectric, and solar.

Congress created LIHEAP in 1981 to help low-income families pay their home heating bills after the Iran-Iraq war caused oil prices to spike. The program now serves more than six million households a year.

WAP helps by repairing or replacing heating and cooling systems, improving the home's ability to retain energy, and improving the health and safety of home energy systems.

The two programs often work together and help families weather the extremes of winter and summer. In most states, the easiest way to apply is to contact your local community action agency. If you don't know the name of the agency, you can call the National Energy Assistance Referral hotline (1-866-674-6327) and ask for the contact information of your local agency.

IF YOU'RE STRUGGLING TO PAY YOUR UTILITY BILL

If you're struggling to pay your utility bill, you should take proactive steps to address the situation and seek assistance.

Contact your utility provider: Reach out to your utility company as soon as you anticipate difficulty in making a payment. They may offer extended payment plans or other arrangements to help ease the burden. Some utility companies have programs specifically designed for those facing financial hardships, especially during extreme-weather months when energy usage is high.

Review your energy consumption: Reducing energy use can help lower your bills. Consider conducting a home energy audit (either yourself or by hiring a professional) to identify areas of energy wastage.

Seek financial counseling: Local nonprofit agencies often offer free or low-cost financial counseling. They can assist in creating a budget, managing debt, and finding resources to help pay bills.

Negotiate a payment plan: If you can't pay the full amount, ask your utility provider if it will accept smaller payments over time. It may prefer this arrangement to no payment at all.

Stay informed: Be aware of your rights as a consumer. Many places have specific rules regarding utility shutoffs, especially during extreme weather conditions or when vulnerable people (such as children or the elderly) are in the home.

Seek assistance programs: In addition to LIHEAP and WAP, there may be other local funds designed to help with utility bills in an emergency. Ask your utility and local community energy programs about any other assistance programs in your area.

RESOURCES

Visit these sites for additional information:

LOW INCOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (LIHEAP)

liheapch.acf.hhs.gov/search-tool/

WEATHERIZATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

energy.gov/scep/wap/how-apply-weatherization-assistance

US DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

energy.gov/save

ENERGY STAR

energystar.gov

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