TEN INEXPENSIVE WAYS TO winterize your home

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If you haven't already started preparing for winter it's not too late or too complex. Plus, it does not have to be expensive. Stick to the basics and save energy. Here is a checklist of 10 home energy prep tips for less than $50:

1. **Control Your Heating System Thermostat.** You can save on your heating bill by keeping your thermostat at an energy efficient and comfortable setting during the day and turning the heat down at night and when you're not home. Try 68°F or less during the day and 60°F when you're away or sleeping. You can adjust the thermostat manually or you can purchase a programmable automatic thermostat to do this for you. You'll save approximately 1% for every degree of night setback. When you're chilly, put on a sweater rather than click on the heat. If you have a boiler (hot water heat), night set-back can be worthwhile but because of slower recovery times you may not be able to set your thermostat back as much as with a forced air furnace.

2. **Lower Your Water Temperature.** Your hot water is probably hotter than necessary. Most heaters are set at 140°F. This high a setting is only needed if you have a dishwasher without a booster heater. Turn the temperature down to 120°F (medium setting on a gas heater dial) and you'll cut your water heating costs by 6-10%.

3. **Insulate Your Water Heater.** Wrapping the heater tank in a blanket of fiberglass insulation could reduce heat loss by 25-45%, especially for heaters located in an unheated area like a basement or garage. This means a savings of 4-9% on your water heating bill. Water heater jacket kits are available for $10-$20 at your local hardware store. Be sure to follow the installation directions. It's especially important not to block exhaust vents and air intakes on gas models, and thermostat access panels on electric heaters with insulation. Be sure to read the water heater's manufacturer's recommendations because the manufacturer may not recommend insulation wrap for newer water heaters.

4. **Plug House Air Leaks.** On a cold and windy day, do you feel the breezes blowing through your house – especially near trouble spots such as wall outlets, windows, doors and fireplaces? As the cold comes in, your heat (and your money) flies away. You can stop this heat loss quickly and easily with low-cost materials. On windows, use clear weather-strip tape along the gap where the glass meets the frame and to seal any cracks. On double-hung windows, tape over the pulley hole and use rope caulk between the upper and lower windows. To stop leakage under exterior doors, roll up towels to block the breeze or buy an inexpensive door sweep. If the door leaks around the entire frame, install foam weather-stripping with adhesive backing between the door and the frame. If you don't use your fireplace much and it doesn't have a door, make sure the damper is closed and the opening is sealed. Cardboard and tape are low-cost and effective materials to do the job. Another low-cost option is to plug the chimney with a plastic bag full of crumpled newspaper or insulation. Be sure to post a highly visible reminder to remove the bag before building a fire.

   Use caulk to seal along the basement sill plate and around door and window frames. Also seal little holes around water pipes and stuff insulation into big holes around plumbing fixtures. Heat leaks out of light switches and electrical outlets, too. Inexpensive foam gaskets that fit behind the cover plates easily solve this problem. Remember, every hole you plug means fewer drafts, a cozier home and lower heating bills.

5. **Install Storm Windows.** Once you have sealed air leaks around your windows, you can increase their insulating value by installing storm windows. Adding another layer of glass or plastic creates a dead air space, and trapped air is an excellent insulator. Plastic film window kits are the lowest-cost option and can work as well or better than expensive and permanently applied storm windows. Do-it-yourself storm window kits can be easily installed on the inside or outside of your existing windows. Be sure the air space is at least ½ inch and not more than 4 inches.

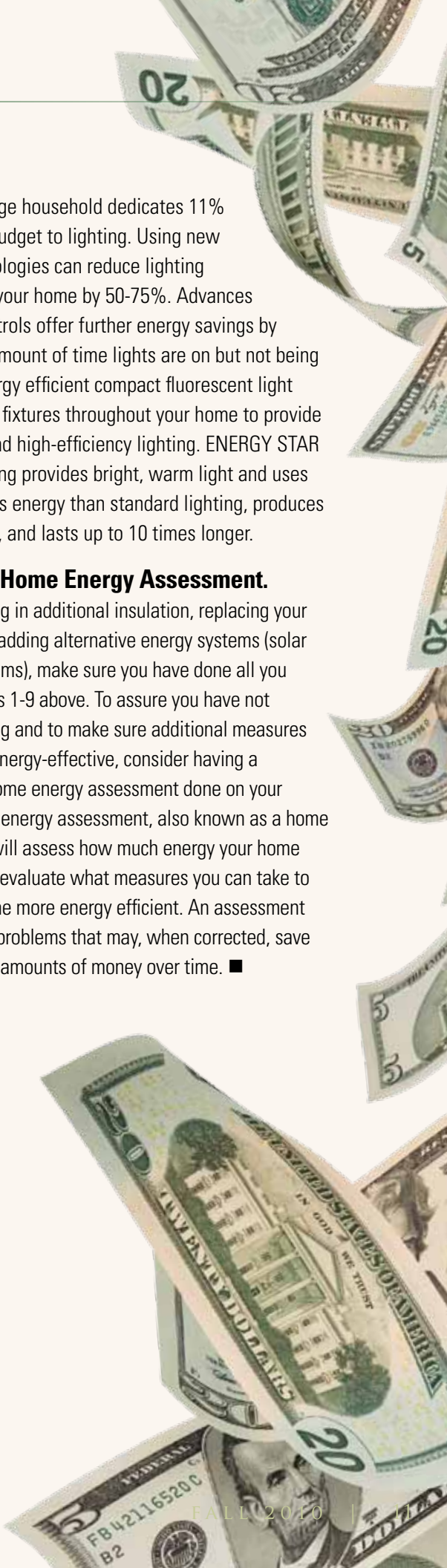
6. **Regularly Clean or Replace Your Furnace Filter.** If you have a forced air furnace, it will have a filter to keep the furnace clean and to keep dust and dirt from blowing through the duct work and throughout the house. Each month of the heating season, clean or replace your furnace filter(s). If not periodically cleaned or replaced, dirty filters can greatly affect the heating ability of the furnace and waste valuable fuel. Some filters are disposable, while others can be washed and reused. Do not reuse disposable filters. New ones can often be purchased for less than $1.

7. **Save Hot Water–Replace Shower Head.** A standard shower head sprays you with up to 8 gallons per minute of hot, steaming water. Replacing it with a quality low-flow shower head will allow you to use only 1 to 2 gallons of water—and you'll hardly notice a difference—except on your utility bill! Low-flow showerheads cost between $10 and $20 and pay for themselves in about four months by reducing water consumption and energy used to heat the water.

8. **Wash Clothes in Cold Water.** Try washing clothes in cold water using cold water detergents, and wash full loads whenever possible. Water heating accounts for 90% of the energy used by washing machines. Washing in hot water costs $0.20-$0.40 per load. That adds up, and is not necessary, except for special loads such as diapers or stained work clothes.

9. **Improve Lighting.** Making improvements to your lighting is one of the fastest ways to cut your energy bills. An average household dedicates 11% of its energy budget to lighting. Using new lighting technologies can reduce lighting energy use in your home by 50-75%. Advances in lighting controls offer further energy savings by reducing the amount of time lights are on but not being used. Use energy efficient compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) in fixtures throughout your home to provide high-quality and high-efficiency lighting. ENERGY STAR qualified lighting provides bright, warm light and uses about 75% less energy than standard lighting, produces 75% less heat, and lasts up to 10 times longer.

10. **Consider a Home Energy Assessment.** Before investing in additional insulation, replacing your windows, and adding alternative energy systems (solar and wind systems), make sure you have done all you can do on steps 1-9 above. To assure you have not missed anything and to make sure additional measures are cost- and energy-effective, consider having a professional home energy assessment done on your home. A home energy assessment, also known as a home energy audit, will assess how much energy your home consumes and evaluate what measures you can take to make your home more energy efficient. An assessment will show you problems that may, when corrected, save you significant amounts of money over time. ■



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