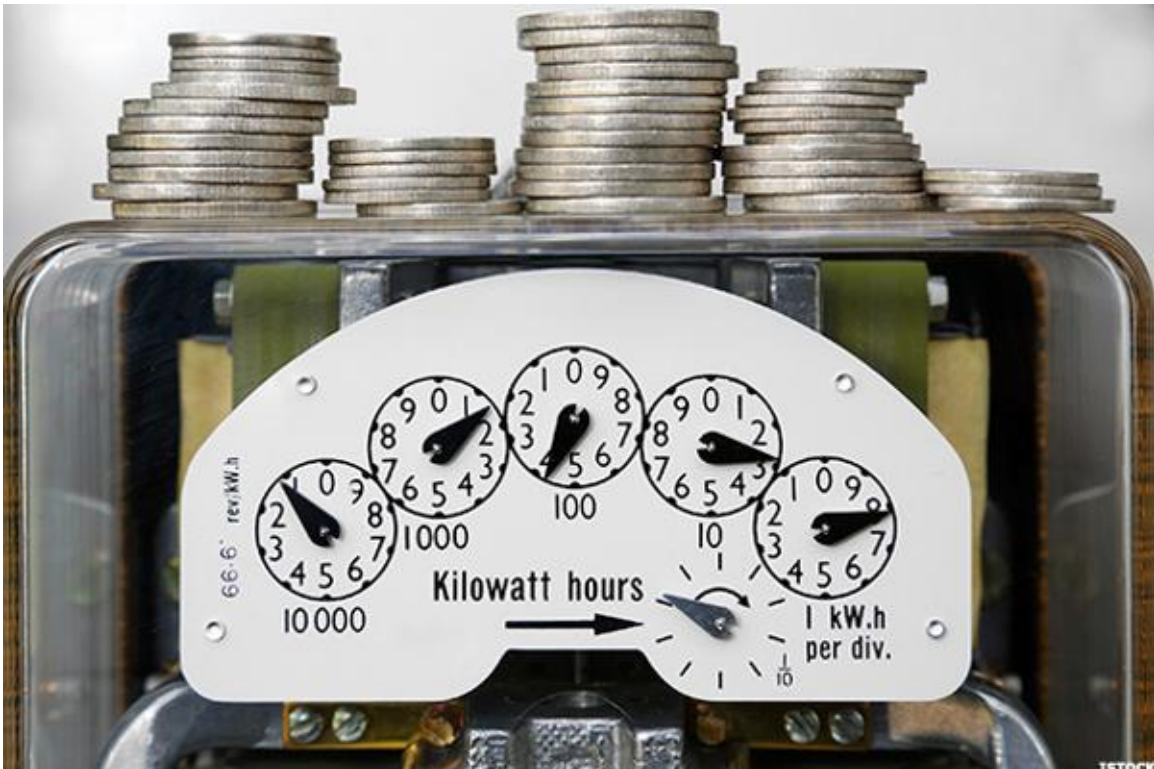


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Slaying Household Energy Hogs: Tips On Cutting Those Pesky Summer Utility Bills



When the summer temperatures approach 80 degrees, it's tempting to flip on the air conditioner to cool off. But doing so may have the opposite effect when your utility bills come and causes you to heat up at the thought of paying hundreds of dollars in electric costs.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration states that Americans paid, on average, \$395.00 on their electric bills alone in June, July and August 2013, while electricity prices rose by 1.3% - roughly the rate of inflation - in 2014, the EIA states.

The secret your utilities company doesn't want you to know is there's no shortage of ways homeowners and renters can use to curb their utility bills on a monthly basis. Not only that, there are common energy-sucking culprits that are racking up homeowners' utility bills without your even realizing it.

Take your average HVAC unit, which gobbles up 40% of your household's electricity. Appliances chew up 17%, and your home's water heater (12%) and lighting (11%) also add significantly to your home energy bill. "What this means is those unsexy fixes, like making sure you have the right kind and amount of insulation - and most of our homes are low on insulation - can save you a bunch," notes Cheryl Reed, director of external communications at Angie's List. "Sealing up the house to ensure you're not cooling the outside is another fix with long-lasting and big impact."

For example, major appliances, especially that HVAC unit, are the number one energy eater in your home - but there are big savings with that big energy hog, too. "When your HVAC unit is involved, there are several things you can do to cut back on your utility bills this summer without sacrificing your comfort," says Chris Rattray, a franchisee of the Aire Serv, in Marion County, Ore. "Ceiling fans create a wind chill effect, allowing you to adjust thermostat settings by 4 to 7 degrees and still remain comfortable. Make sure your fan is running in a counterclockwise motion during the summer months and turn off fans when leaving the room. This can cut your cooling bill by up to 30%."

Then there's another energy hog right in your kitchen. "Keep the refrigerator clean and airtight for top efficiency to cut down on your electric bill," says Reed. "Also, clean the unit's condenser coils at least annually, and check door seals to ensure they're airtight. Test your door's seal to ensure it's keeping the cold air in by closing the door on a thin sheet of paper. If the paper slips, your fridge is wasting energy and costing you extra [money](#)."

Additionally, each degree you dial your air conditioner above 78°F decreases energy usage, and the average homeowner can save about \$8 a month per degree, adds Reed. "Dial it up when you're not going to be at home - programmable thermostats make that chore easy."

Often it's the simple steps that can save money on summer utility costs.

For example, a dirty air filter will easily add 15% to your electric bill during months where you run the air conditioner, but replacing it only costs \$7, says Mike Catania, chief technology officer at PromotionCode.org, an online promotion codes and discount coupons provider. "Further, unplugging your devices or buying a smart power strip can chop 10% or more from your electric bill in the reduction of phantom power or standby power. The average home has 40-plus plugs in use at any given time, so simply unplugging the ones you're not using reduces your carbon footprint and saves you money with no downside."

Gene Wang, CEO and co-founder of People Power, a Redwood City, Calif.-based software services provider, says look to your television to curb electric costs this summer.

"Your beloved plasma TV can suck up over 1,400 kilowatt hours annually, adding up to as much as \$150 every year, and cable boxes use about 500 kilowatt hours per year, because they're already plugged in sucking power, even when you're not watching television," notes Wang. "Combined, cable boxes alone cost Americans \$2 billion in wasted electricity each year."

Wang offers a good tip on turning off power sources in one fell swoop. "Try to group energy vampires, like your television, game console and cable box together on one power strip," he says. "That way you can easily turn all the devices on and off with one switch. Smart power plugs can detect how much electricity your 'energy vampires' are consuming and can be set to automatically turn off every night and then turn back on every morning."

Lastly, focus on your water bill to really make a dent in your household utility bill.

"It's no secret that hot summer weather usually means an increased use of water in the home, which in turn means an increase in your monthly water bill," notes Glenn Gallas, vice president of operations for Mr. Rooter Plumbing in Waco, Texas. "With a little extra attention to detail, homeowners and renters can easily avoid a jacked up monthly expense."

Be on the lookout for faucet leaks, says Gallas. "Even the smallest drip from a worn faucet can cause a flow of an added 20 gallons water per day, while larger leaks can waste hundreds of gallons," Gallas says. "For the 'not as obvious' leaks, you can use a water meter to check things."

Just a few simple steps can save you hundreds of dollars on your water bill this summer. That leaves more cash for July 4th barbecues, baseball games, and languid days at the beach - all nice rewards for fighting those household energy vampires and keeping them at bay.