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Simple Steps to Combat High Heating Costs

- What The Home Performance with ENERGY STAR® Program Can Do to Help Wisconsin Homeowners Save Money This Winter -

MADISON, Wis. (October 2, 2006) — Wisconsin homeowners will continue to see high heating bills this winter, as fuel source levels and prices are projected to remain the same as they were at this time last year. This temporary reprieve from even higher bills offers homeowners the chance to shield themselves from energy uncertainties down the road. One way for them to do this is by enlisting the help of Focus on Energy’s Home Performance with ENERGY STAR Program.

“If anything, events like Hurricane Katrina have taught us lessons about being prepared for supply shortages and high prices. Now is the time to develop a long term strategy to defend against these problems,” said Bob Pfeiffer, Focus on Energy’s program manager for the Home Performance with ENERGY STAR Program. “A homeowner’s first step against high energy bills is much easier than they may imagine, and we can help them get there.”

It may surprise most people to know that, while high heating bills are mostly attributed to high energy costs, more commonly they can be traced to poorly performing and out-dated components of their homes. It’s not always easy to pinpoint these areas of concern; however, with advances in building science, HVAC and systems technologies, as well as sophisticated diagnostic procedures homeowners now have the opportunity to greatly increase the performance of their homes. With the help of the Home Performance with ENERGY STAR Program, there are steps homeowners can take to alleviate these problems making their homes more efficient and less susceptible to high heating costs.

According to Pfeiffer, “The best way to get relief from high heating costs is to identify the problems within the home and find real solutions that save energy and money; these solutions can make the home more comfortable, safe and durable.”

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Pfeiffer explained that, “there are things homeowners can do right away, without much cost or effort, to lessen the energy used to heat their home.” The following are some easy fixes homeowners can make today:

1. **Buy a programmable thermostat.** Inexpensive and easy to install, these programmable thermostats automatically turn the heat down during weekdays and at night, after you program in your household’s occupancy patterns. By not heating the home when no one is there, homeowners can save as much as \$100 per year.
2. **Turn down the heat.** By turning thermostats down one or two degrees, homeowners can reduce the amount of energy used and save money. Reducing your thermostat setting by one degree for eight hours will save about one percent on your heating bill. The more you set back your thermostat, the greater the savings.
3. **Change the direction of ceiling fans.** Ceiling fans are useful all year round. In fact, ENERGY STAR qualified ceiling fans move air up to 20 percent more efficiently than standard ceiling fans, saving you up to \$25 a year on energy bills, when your fan is operated properly. Adjusting the motor so the fan runs at a low speed in a clockwise direction will produce a gentle updraft, which forces warm air near the ceiling down to occupied space. However, be sure to turn the fan off when you leave the room.
4. **Maintain the heating system.** To keep the furnace running at peak efficiency, it is important to keep it maintained. That means scheduling yearly maintenance and regularly changing the filter throughout the year. Also, make sure the supply and return registers aren’t obstructed and “in-line” dampers are properly adjusted.
5. **Seal ductwork.** Leaky ducts decrease the furnace’s ability to deliver heat to where it is needed. By sealing ducts with foil tape or duct mastic, homeowners ensure the heat goes where it is supposed to go. Ductwork in unheated areas need to be insulated after the joints are sealed.
6. **Replace Outdated Heating System.** Installing a new heating system in your home is the perfect time for you to talk to a consultant partnering with the Home Performance with ENERGY STAR Program. By working with them to assess the heating needs of your home, and by utilizing the Efficient Heating & Cooling Initiative offered through Focus on Energy, you will get properly sized, high efficiency equipment, that will allow you to increase the comfort of your home and help lower your heating bill.

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7. **Add Insulation.** Insulation is designed to resist heat flow – that is, if it is cold outside, insulation helps keep the heat inside the house. In the winter, a lack of insulation makes walls very cold and the furnace must work harder to keep the house warm. To get the biggest savings, the easiest place to add insulation is in the attic; however, it is important to determine how much and what kind of insulation you already have. Consultants and qualified contractors that partner with the Home Performance with ENERGY STAR Program are trained to help you identify your insulation needs.

Finally, Pfeiffer recommends that homeowners schedule a Home Performance with ENERGY STAR energy evaluation. This comprehensive evaluation consists of an inspection of all systems in the home including the building shell, heating and cooling equipment, air infiltration and insulation levels. Once the evaluation is complete, homeowners receive a report that identifies problems and recommends solutions.

To find a consultant partnering with the Home Performance with ENERGY STAR Program near them, homeowners can visit focusonenergy.com or call 800.762.7077. Consultants listed on the Focus on Energy Web site have been trained by Focus on Energy and have agreed to uphold the standards set for the Home Performance with ENERGY STAR Program. Each consultant operates independently, running their own business and setting their own fees. Focus on Energy recommends calling more than one consultant to compare prices.

About Focus on Energy

Focus on Energy is a public-private partnership offering energy information and services to energy utility customers throughout Wisconsin. The goals of this program are to encourage energy efficiency and use of renewable energy, enhance the environment and ensure the future supply of energy for Wisconsin. Since July 2001, the program has helped Wisconsin's businesses and residents cut their annual utility bills by more than \$98 million – reducing their energy consumption by more than 811 million kilowatt-hours and more than 40 million therms of natural gas. For more information, call 800.762.7077 or visit focusonenergy.com.

About ENERGY STAR

ENERGY STAR was introduced by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 1992 as a voluntary market-based partnership to reduce air pollution through increased energy efficiency. Today, with assistance from the U.S. Department of Energy, the ENERGY STAR Program offers businesses and consumers energy efficient solutions to save energy, money and help protect the environment for future generations. More than 8,000 organizations have become ENERGY STAR partners and are committed to improving the energy efficiency of products, homes and businesses.