

Wise investments in energy efficiency

The economic uncertainty we're facing these days has many of us putting money into something we feel comfortable with: our homes.

Making a few upgrades around the house generally pays big dividends. And when boosting energy efficiency is one of them, the decision becomes a no-brainer.

For any energy-efficiency work made at your residence during the coming year, Uncle Sam will foot 30 percent of the bill — not a bad deal! Through the 2009 American Recovery and

Reinvestment Act — better known as the stimulus bill — the Internal Revenue Service offers a personal tax credit of up to \$1,500 for energy-efficiency improvements made to existing homes during 2009 and 2010.

The credit covers 30 percent of the cost of adding insulation materials and exterior doors, windows and roofs designed to help reduce a home's heat loss or gain. It also includes efficient central air conditioners, air-source heat pumps, hot water boilers and biomass stoves.

For weatherization-related work, the credit covers only the cost of materials. With heating, ventilation and air-conditioning systems as well as biomass stoves, installation costs also count toward the credit.

So how does the math work out? Say you spend \$1,000 on new insulation. You would get, in the form of a tax credit, \$300 back. If you spend

\$3,000 to purchase a new HVAC system and have it installed, you'd have a \$900 tax credit to show for it.

To take advantage of the program, a home improvement must have taken place after Feb. 17, 2009 (the day the stimulus bill was signed into law), and **products must meet specific energy-efficiency criteria.** A few rules of thumb will help you determine those criteria.



Larry Elkins
General Manager
Holston Electric Cooperative

For exterior windows and skylights, rely on the Energy Star label. For other efficiency upgrades, request what's called a "Manufacturer Certification Statement" that the product or component qualifies for the tax credit. Many manufacturers post these on their Web sites, but be sure to verify that the product does qualify before making a purchase. You can also visit energystar.gov/taxcredits to review guidelines for eligible purchases.

Energy tax credits reduce taxes owed, dollar for dollar, and can be carried forward to following years. While they can help boost any refund you

receive, you won't receive a check directly for the credit amount. You can file for energy tax credits using IRS Form 5695, with a total maximum value of \$1,500 for improvements made in 2009 and 2010.

If you have specific questions about provisions in the federal stimulus bill, be sure to consult your tax preparer or accountant.

Visit energystar.gov/taxcredits to review guidelines for eligible purchases.



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To report an outage or electrical emergency, call 423-272-8821 or 423-235-6811 day or night.

Keep out the cold with weather stripping

No mistaking it: Winter has arrived. Any drafts around doors and windows that went unnoticed during fall are now downright uncomfortable — and adding to your energy bills.

Weather stripping offers a relatively quick fix for drafty doors. To determine if a door leading out of your house needs new weather stripping, look for daylight. If even a sliver of daylight remains visible between the door and its frame or the floor, add weather stripping.

Next, shut the door or window on a piece of paper. If you can pull the paper out without tearing it, you're losing energy.

There are a variety of weather stripping materials available, each good for fitting different types of door and window frames. Most are made of rubber, foam, metal, vinyl or a combination of materials. To determine the right item for the job, check the area: If any old, worn material has been previously installed, take a sample to your local hardware store or an expert like a contractor. If no material exists as a guide, make detailed notes about the type of gap and how the door or window is installed — someone at the hardware store or your expert should be able to make a recommendation for you.

Once you have the proper materials for the job, consult any instructions that may be on the weather stripping package. Installation techniques range from simple to technical, depending on the type of material

Weather Stripping Basics

While you should always consult specific instructions on weather stripping packages, here are some basic facts to keep in mind.

- 1** Weather stripping should be applied to clean, dry surfaces in temperatures above 20° F.
- 2** Measure the area to be weather stripped twice before you cut anything.
- 3** Apply weather stripping snugly against both surfaces. The material should compress when the window or door is shut.

Source: National Rural Electric Cooperative Association



being used. If replacing old, worn weather stripping, be sure to note how it was installed as you remove it.

Here are a few basic guidelines:

- Weather stripping should be applied to clean, dry surfaces in temperatures above 20 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Before you cut anything, carefully measure the area to be weather stripped.
- Apply weather stripping snugly against both surfaces. The material should compress when the window or door is shut.

When weather stripping doors:

- Choose the appropriate door sweeps and thresholds.
- Weather strip the entire door jamb.
- Apply one continuous strip along each side.
- Make sure the weather stripping meets tightly at the corners.
- Use a thickness that causes the weather stripping to tightly press between the door and the door jamb without making it difficult to shut.

When weather stripping windows:

- Apply weather stripping between the sash and frame.
- The weather stripping shouldn't interfere with the operation of the window.



Energy Efficiency

Tip of the Month

Federal tax credits are available for home energy efficiency improvements, including windows, doors, water heaters, and HVAC equipment for existing homes. For details visit energystar.gov/taxcredits.

Want efficient, safe laundry? Leave no lint behind

Household chores like laundry seem fairly safe. But hidden problems like lint buildup in a dryer could lead to higher energy bills due to inefficiency and, ultimately, hazardous conditions in your home.

“Lint is the bane of our existence,” declares Brian Wallace, president of the Coin Laundry Association in Oakbrook Terrace, Ill. “We have to clean lint not only as a safety issue but to keep our energy costs down and ensure proper performance.”

At coin-operated laundries, dryers are key to customer satisfaction. Other amenities pale if clothes don’t dry fast enough, so laundry owners remain adamant about maintaining proper airflow through commercial dryers. With 30 to 50 dryers at an average laundry, every day operators clear trashcans of lint from their screens.

The same principle applies at home, although on a smaller scale.

“Cleaning the lint filter after every cycle is one habit we want to encourage,” recommends Jill Notini, communications and marketing director for the Washington, D.C.-headquartered Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers (AHAM). “Repetition builds a habit.”

AHAM urges consumers to clean the lint filter after each load and occasionally remove the filter and wash it with a nylon brush and hot, soapy water to remove residue. This simple chore not only improves air flow and energy efficiency but also reduces the chance of a dryer fire.

Statistics on dryer fires show no difference between the natural gas and electric dryers, according to John Drenenberg, consumer affairs manager for Underwriters Laboratories Inc. (UL), a Chicago-based not-for-profit firm that tests and sets minimum standards for electric-consuming items. “If you forget to clean the lint screen too many times, you’re going to get a buildup, and that’s where ultimately you could have a problem.”

Manufacturers whose products carry the UL mark are required to ship dryers

with safety instructions that specify cleaning the lint screen before or after each load. These instructions also recommend keeping all of your dryer exhaust openings and adjacent surrounding areas free from accumulated lint, dust and dirt and having qualified service people periodically clean the dryer’s interior and exhaust duct.

Without adequate air circulation, heat flow becomes stymied, clothes take longer to dry and it costs more to operate the appliance. Like ovens and stoves, dryers apply extreme heat on potentially flammable materials.

“You wouldn’t leave something cooking unattended for long periods of time — at least you shouldn’t, for safety and edibility,” Drenenberg notes. “Dryers, though, often run up to an hour or more, forgotten in a basement, garage or utility space.”

This out-of-sight, out-of-mind practice makes it essential that a dryer be maintained on a simple and regular basis.

Source: Underwriters Laboratories

Stay Safe, Energy-Efficient and Lint-Free

For energy-efficient and safe dryer performance, lint must be removed from the dryer and vent to allow air to circulate freely. Here are ways to avoid lint buildup:

- Clean the lint filter after each load.
- Occasionally remove the lint filter and clean it with a nylon brush and hot, soapy water.
- Periodically clean the back of the dryer where lint can be trapped.
- Keep the area around and on top of the dryer clean and free of clutter.
- Have a qualified service person clean the interior of the appliance and venting system once a year.
- Thoroughly clean the vent system if you notice your drying times have increased.



Source: Underwriters Laboratories

A diverse option for America's energy future

By Scott Gates

Congress has been debating climate-change legislation for months. Now the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has begun gearing up for its own possible set of regulations to slash emissions of greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide blamed for contributing to global warming. With more than 70 percent of our nation's electricity coming from greenhouse gas-emitting fossil fuels like coal and natural gas, the question becomes: How do we reduce emissions while still making enough electricity available?

For the past several years, the Palo Alto, Calif.-based Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI) has been hard at work coming up with an answer. The research group, which includes electric cooperatives as members, recently released an updated set of possible remedies that could meet our energy needs while dramatically reining in carbon dioxide emissions over coming decades.

Called the EPRI Prism after the broad spectrum of solutions described (and resulting colorful graphics tracking emissions cuts associated with each), the proposal consists of a set of recommendations in eight technology areas that, if adopted nationally, would allow electric utilities to slow, halt and eventually decrease carbon dioxide emissions by 2030 while still supplying safe, affordable and reliable electricity.

The eight components are boosting end-use energy efficiency, making transmission and distribution system lines more efficient, improving the operating efficiency of fossil fuel-fired power plants, investing in renewable energy, expanding nuclear power capacity, capturing and storing carbon dioxide produced by coal-fired power plants, deploying electrotechnologies like arc furnaces for industrial and commercial use and putting plug-in hybrid electric vehicles on the road.

The key involves utilizing all technologies together, with each doing its part to reduce emissions. Failure to maximize any of the eight technologies in the

"full portfolio" will dramatically jack up the cost of achieving climate-change goals, according to EPRI.

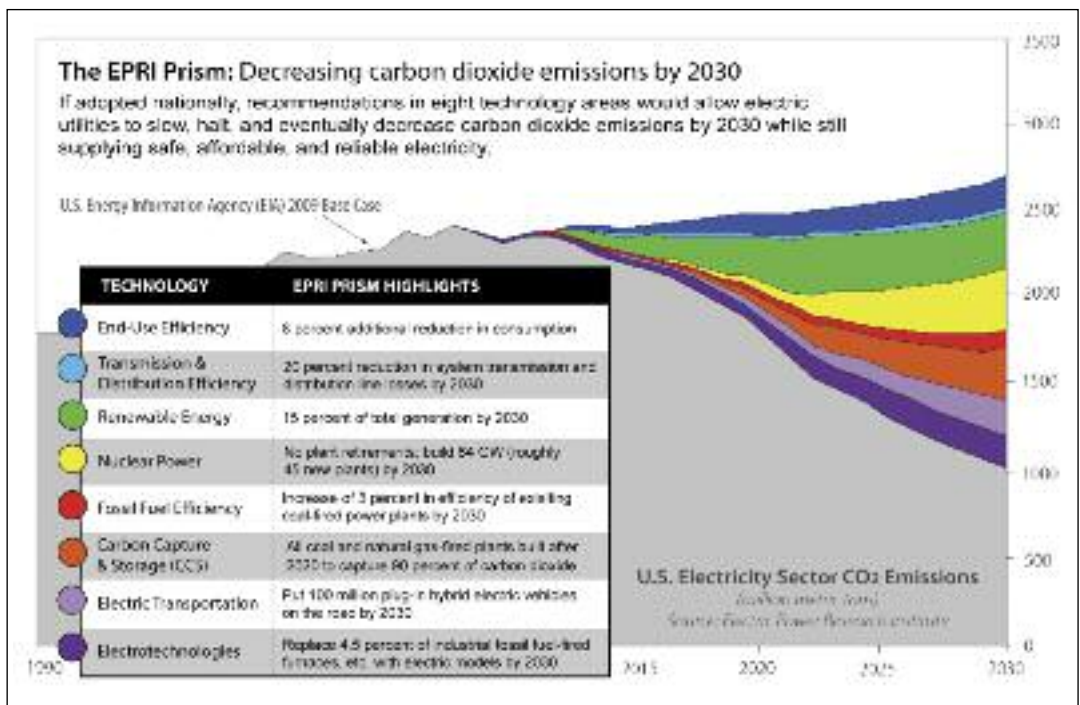
"There just isn't going to be a free lunch," remarks Revis James, director of EPRI's Energy Technology Assessment Center. "If this type of policy is actually implemented, it's going to cost money, even in an efficient scenario."

Assuming the full range of carbon-curbing technologies are up and running by 2050 (the target date being discussed in congressional climate-change legislative proposals), EPRI pegs the real wholesale cost of electricity to increase 80 percent. But continuing business as usual under tightening carbon dioxide emissions restrictions would spike wholesale power costs more than 210 percent.

Diversifying the nation's generation-fuel mix could lead to major savings down the road. Employing the full EPRI Prism, as opposed to relying on a few, less technologically advanced resources, will slash the impact on the nation's economy by more than \$1 trillion.

"Policymakers need to be made aware that the full portfolio carries a lower cost overall to the economy than a more limited approach," James stresses. "Heading in that direction clearly is in our national interest."

Scott Gates writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the Arlington, Va.-based service arm of the nation's 900-plus consumer-owned, not-for-profit electric cooperatives.





Resolve to let the sun power your year

If you've resolved to be more energy-efficient this year, here's a tip: Let the sun into your home, especially on cold days. It's the most powerful source of energy around us.

You don't have to install big, expensive panels on your roof to use solar power, although that option is getting cheaper and more realistic. Instead, look around your home for ways to let the sun work as a heater and a lightbulb.

Here are a few solar baby steps:

Clean your windows. Even the sun can't peek through windows that are covered with grime left behind by snow or rain that splashes your panes. Wash the outside and inside. If you can't reach them all, consider hiring a professional window-cleaning company to help you.

Trim your hedges. Overgrown shrubs and trees can shade your windows too much. On cold days, the sunlight that beams into your home will help warm it up.



Open your drapes. If privacy is a concern, add light-colored sheer panels that you can keep closed all day without blocking the sun's rays.

Choose shiny surfaces. Add some polished brass or chrome to bathrooms and other sun-deprived areas of your home. They'll catch and reflect the little sunlight that makes its way into the rooms. Throw in some shiny tile on the floors and around sinks as a decorative back-splash.

Hang mirrors across from windows. They'll not only make your rooms look bigger, but they will bounce sunrays all

around the room.

Paint everything a light color. Light colors like white, cream and yellow reflect sunlight and will make any room look brighter. Semi-gloss and satin paints make the walls even more reflective.



and counting.

More than 600,000 electric co-op members from across the nation wrote to their U.S. senators in 2009. Each postcard called for Congress to pursue fair, affordable and achievable climate-change goals.

Has your voice been heard?

Speak up at www.ourenergy.coop

Power out? Light your house in a 'flash'

The flashlight has been illuminating dark homes since its invention in 1898. Joshua Lionel Cowen — the same guy who invented toy Lionel trains — claimed he also invented the flashlight. The owner of the American Eveready Battery Co., Cowen said he used a metal tube with a light bulb and a dry cell battery to illuminate flower pots. When he got bored with his invention, the story goes, he passed it along to a salesman at the company, Conrad Hubert, who used the device to make the world's first flashlight.

You probably have a drawer full of flashlights — but how many have working batteries in them? Stock up on batteries that fit your flashlights so you'll be prepared if a winter storm knocks your power out temporarily.

More tips for seeing in the dark:

- Store flashlights — and fresh batteries — in lots of locations around your home so they'll be close by if the lights go out.
- Locate the circuit breakers in your house and learn how to check for tripped breakers or blown fuses. If your power does go out, it could be a problem with your electrical panel. Check there before calling to report a power outage.
- Attach the phone number for Holston EC (272-8821 or 238-6811) to your phone or refrigerator so you'll know where to find it in case you need to report a power outage.