



Save energy and spend less

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Minimizing energy usage in your home doesn't necessarily mean a major structural overhaul. Here are simple and effective steps you can take to do your part to save the environment — and save money.

"It doesn't have to be hard or time consuming," said Emmanuel Blain Cosgrove, Director of www.EcoHabitation.com, a LEED certification provider, who suggests switching to low flow shower heads, covering hot water tanks with insulated blankets, putting lids on pots while cooking, and using electric—not stove top—kettles which use less energy by containing heat instead of letting it evaporate.

Little things like this can make a big difference with energy costs on the rise. Between 1990 and 2006 residential energy use increased by almost 5 per cent. During the 15-year period between 2005 and 2020, demand is forecast to increase further by 15 per cent according to Natural Resources Canada.

So for homeowners looking to do a little bit to conserve, a lot of options are available.

"Windows are an excellent first step because often they need to be replaced anyway," said Cheryl Gladu, co-founder of EcoCité, a national eco-development and consulting group.

"In Quebec where it's really really cold or really really hot, you have to control for that because you're wasting money in either heating or cooling. If hot and cold are going through your home, that's your money bleeding into the air."

Replacing windows for better insulation can save both energy and money because better insulation will limit draftiness by controlling air exchanges. This will minimize the energy production necessary for heating and cooling your home. The Energy Efficiency Fund (EEF) will pay up to \$500 to Gaz Métro Clients who use energy-efficient windows and five dollars per square foot of ENERGY STAR qualified energy-efficient sliding doors and windows installed in the home.

Controlling for hot and cold applies to hot water tanks and pipes as well, and you can buy pipe wrap for the hot water pipes accessible in your basement, said Cosgrove.

"That way when you stop using the water, the hot water left in the pipes when you turn off the faucet doesn't get cold. It's kind of like having a cup of coffee in an insulated mug—it stays warmer for longer."

Sealing the joints between the floors and walls, underneath sinks, and any and all places where drafts can come in doesn't take too much time and can save money, said Gladu, who took a candle along the baseboards in her apartment to make sure there were no gaps in the seal.

"Wherever you see a draft you know there's a leak," said Gladu, who then takes an (eco-friendly) sealant to caulk the holes.

A less time consuming option is to buy a digital thermostat. That way you'll have a more precise temperature measurement, and the ability to time when you want the heat on or off. The EEF will give you a \$30 rebate for the purchase of a programmable electronic thermostat.

"Getting in the habit of wearing slippers to be able to drop the temperature of your thermostat a degree and closing your curtains at night in the wintertime," said Cosgrove. "These are all things that everyone kind of knows but doesn't remember."