

Brrrrr. It's Cold In There!

Energy Savers Blog

This winter has seemed like an especially long one to me. I'm ready to wear shorts and enjoy nice, long summer days. Alas, the reality is that it will probably be cold for at least another month here in Washington, D.C. All that cold air robs not only our jacketed bodies of warmth, but it also carries heat away from the places where we want it most this time of year: our homes, apartments, and businesses.

All that heat loss costs money. I've been in friends' houses that just never seem to stay warm, even when their furnace kicks on every 15 or 20 minutes. I can just hear the swishing sound of them flushing money down the toilet—not the most efficient thing they could do with it! So I've been thinking about what they can do save money and keep the cold where it belongs: outside.

The logical first step for anybody wanting to improve the energy efficiency of their home is to begin with a [home energy audit](#) [1]. We blogged in-depth about the different kinds of audits on Energy Savers awhile back—it's [essential reading](#) [2] for understanding the basics of performing an energy audit in your home or business. In a nutshell, through a series of tests, the audit identifies all of problem areas of the building, such as air leaks, moisture problems and inefficient appliances, and it prioritizes the most critical ways that owners can improve their home or office's energy use. The auditor will produce list of cost-effective things to do such as weather-stripping doors, insulating or replacing windows, air-sealing the basement and attic, and so on.

Then, after doing some of your own research and perhaps referring to a consumer [energy pyramid](#) [3], or better yet, consulting with a pro (who can provide the audit and recommendations), it's time to put all that information into action. What you learn from the audit—including all of the improvements you can make that cost you nothing, such as turning off your lights, TVs and computers and running the heater less often—ranges from the obvious to the subtle. Some of the easy, low-hanging fruit can be grabbed by switching to energy-saving [lighting](#) [4], installing a water heater blanket and replacing your old thermostat with an [automated one](#) [5].

Working your way up the [consumer energy pyramid](#) [6], which ranks the most cost-effective ways to make a commitment to an energy-efficient lifestyle, or ticking off your checklist supplied from the energy audit, you'll start getting into the upgrades that cost more money. Improvements such as [air-sealing](#) [7], ENERGY STAR® [products](#) [8], added insulation, high-efficiency heating and cooling [equipment](#) [9] and [windows](#) [10], as identified and prioritized by the energy audit, will bring you closer toward minimizing your energy use.

After shoring up your home or business in all of the ways indicated by the "energy doctor" or auditor who performed your audit, it will make sense to start thinking about the renewable energy system that you've been dreaming about, such as a

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[small wind turbine](#) [11] or roof-mounted [photovoltaic](#) [12] solar array. But efficiency upgrades will bring you more savings for your buck, so they should be performed first. Anybody making any major purchase of energy efficiency or renewable energy equipment should educate themselves about the [incentives](#) [13] that make these technologies affordable to the average consumer. And even if you think this stuff sounds out of reach, you may very well qualify for a Weatherization Assistance Program-sponsored retrofit in [your state](#) [14].

So with all of these ideas, I'll be able to suggest some little things and some big things to my friends that they can do to save money and stay more comfortable year-round. In the meantime, stay warm in there!

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[1]

http://www.energysavers.gov/your_home/energy_audits/index.cfm/mytopic=11160

[2] <http://eereblogs.energy.gov/energysavers/post/Energy-Audits.aspx>

[3] <http://www.eereblogs.energy.gov/energysavers/post/Energy-Pyramids-Useful-Concepts-Not-More-Pyramid-Schemes.aspx>

[4] http://www.energysavers.gov/your_home/lighting_daylighting/index.cfm/mytopic=11980

[5] http://www.energysavers.gov/your_home/space_heating_cooling/index.cfm/mytopic=12720

[6] http://www.mnpower.com/powerofone/one_home/

[7] http://www.energysavers.gov/your_home/insulation_airsealing/index.cfm/mytopic=11220

[8] http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=products.pr_find_es_products

[9] http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=heat_cool.pr_hvac

[10] http://www.energysavers.gov/your_home/windows_doors_skylights/index.cfm/mytopic=13310

[11] http://www1.eere.energy.gov/windandhydro/small_wind_system_faqs.html

[12] http://www1.eere.energy.gov/solar/pv_consumers.html

[13] <http://www1.eere.energy.gov/financing/consumers.html>

[14] http://apps1.eere.energy.gov/weatherization/state_contacts.cfm

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