

When buying air conditioning keep your cool

Daylights Savings Time means natural light later at night and lower electric lighting bills. But as the summer wears on, your electric bill could start to climb as you look for ways to beat the heat.

Keeping yourself cool can be costly. For example, an air conditioner can add up to \$50 to a monthly electric bill. The amount you pay for air conditioning depends on how much electricity the unit uses and how efficiently it cools. When you buy an air conditioner, don't simply buy the largest size for the lowest price. The cooling capacity of

an air conditioner is measured in British thermal units (Btu). The more Btus, the higher the cooling capacity and usually, the more electricity you use. But that doesn't mean more Btus cool the room better.

A 12 foot by 15 foot room could be cooled by 7,500 Btu air conditioner. Using 8,500 Btus would cool the room more quickly, but would not necessarily remove humidity that makes the room uncomfortable. Thus, you would be paying more in operating costs and getting less.

After you compare price, compare

the Energy Efficiency Rating (EER) of the models. The EER is a number usually between seven and 12 with more efficient units getting higher numbers. Check the energy guide labels on air conditioners to determine how the model compares with less efficient and more efficient models of the same capacity.

ONCE YOU OWN an air conditioner, proper use and maintenance can continue to save money. Filters should be cleaned and degree calibrations checked every year. Dirt in the filters

can reduce the air conditioner's efficiency by about 10 percent to 25 percent. In addition, degree calibrations can have errors of two or three degrees. An increase in degrees means higher bills.

Although air conditioners add to your summer energy bills, they aren't the only culprits. Your kitchen appliances account for 20 to 40 percent of your energy use, with the refrigerator and freezer alone using up to 60 percent of that amount. The balance is used by cooling devices, dishwashers and hot water heaters.

Summer is an excuse to reduce use of some of these items, especially those that tend to increase heat in your home. For example, a dishwasher costs only a few dollars a week to use, but by turning it off during the dry cycle and letting dishes dry naturally, you could be saving 50 percent of that cost.

Since you must use some energy to cool your home, you should investigate effects of off-hour usage. While the charge per kilowatt hour may or may not be different, overall use will eventually be reflected in your electric bill. That's because simultaneous demand

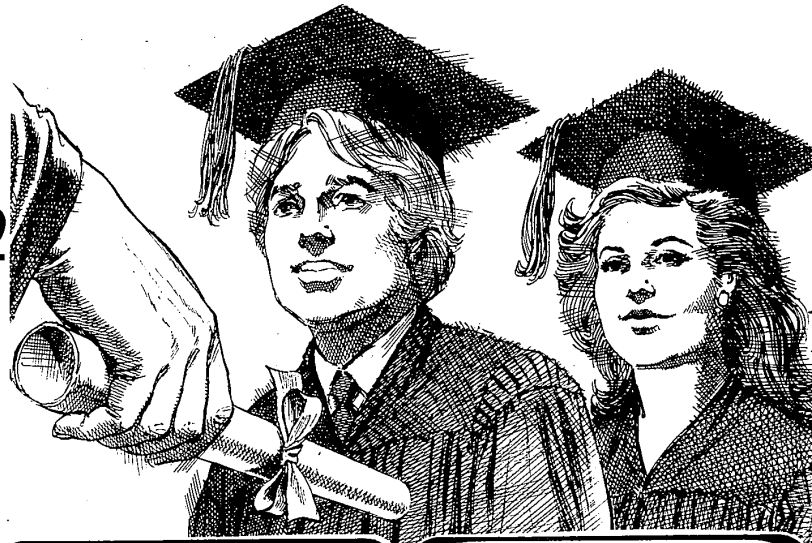
for electricity results in increased equipment needed by power plants and these costs are passed on to the consumer.

One summer example of late-night energy use can be the filter in your swimming pool. Wired-in electric timers can turn appliances on and off, saving you time as well as money. Some timers can handle two or more appliances such as filters, cleaners, and heaters, at once.

As people try to escape the heat, increased use of energy is unavoidable.

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