

Stay comfortable at home while dialing down

Keeping warm takes energy... lots of it. Heating is by far the largest single energy cost in Michigan homes. Fortunately, there are many ways to save on heating energy — simple practices that don't cost money.

For example, you can save by moving your index finger an inch or so. Use that finger to turn down the thermostat on a central furnace.

Try turning the thermostat down two degrees every other day until you find the lowest temperature at which you can be comfortable. Then consistently maintain that lower temperature. But don't turn it so low you are cold: The object is to keep it as low as possible and remain comfortable.

Older people or those with impaired circulation may want to keep the temperature higher, but wearing loose, warm clothing can keep you warm from more cheaply than running your heater or furnace overtime.

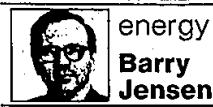
SOME FOLKS wear hats and gloves when inside, reasoning that a hat and pair of gloves are cheaper than hundreds of cubic feet of gas or gallons of oil.

If you are that dedicated, fine. Saving energy/money can be a whole way of life.

Clothing is important when you are dialing down, however. The need for different weights of clothing disappeared as workplaces became more evenly heated.

But if your at-home dress is the same winter and summer, you are wasting money. A sweater, slacks and shoes will keep you just as comfortable as a T-shirt, pair of shorts and sandals — with a money-saving bonus.

If YOU permanently dial down one degree, you can save 3 percent of your annual heating energy usage. Dial down five degrees and save 15 percent. Or you can try my method. If we do not have guests, the thermostat is turned down when our son goes to bed each night. The house retains heat for several hours — enough so that a blanket keeps us comfortable during



energy
Barry Jensen

"Remington Steele."
Since this is the season of gift giving, try giving an energy-saving gift. If you like to watch television in the evening, how about a comforter to keep a TV-viewer warm as he relaxes at the end of the day?

AT NIGHT, reduce the thermostat setting a few more degrees or down to the lowest setting that provides a reasonable degree of comfort.

Savings will be more than 1 percent for every degree dialed down for an eight-hour period each night. For example, a five-degree additional night setback will reduce fuel consumption by 7 percent annually.

If you like to read in bed, a bed jacket with sleeves that extend over the fingertips makes reading in bed possible. Look for a warm fabric — the traditional bed jacket is for receiving guests, not the stout stuff needed for reading in a cold bedroom.

SAVE SOME energy by shutting off all heat to your bedrooms.

If you must have heat when you retire and when you arise, buy a clock-operated automatic thermostat that will turn on the heat a half-hour before you get up.

If you are made of tougher stuff, leave a robe by your bedside to keep you warm while you make a dash for the thermostat every morning.

While a bedroom gets cold without any heat, an electric blanket keeps us older folks warm at night. The pennies it costs to operate an electric blanket is a good trade-off against the dollars to operate central heating.

Babies may not do well in a cold bedroom, but children may not even want a regular blanket, let alone an electric blanket.

If YOU are going away for the holidays (or just away for the weekend), set the furnace thermostat as low as it will go. Do not turn the thermostat off — you must have some heat in an empty house to keep the pipes from freezing.

Most thermostats will go down to 55 degrees, more than enough to keep the water from freezing.

In fact, any time you're away from home for five hours or more, dial down and save.

By now, you know how delicate your house plants are. If they require more than 55 degrees at all times, consider potting them just below fluorescent lights when you lower the thermostat.

And check the lights occasionally to make sure they are not burned out. Frozen vegetables are fine, brown-leaved hot-house flowers are not.

THE BEAUTY of dialing down is that it is simple and inexpensive. But if you have a forgetful finger, you may want to install an automatic setback thermostat to help you realize these savings.

Storm windows and storm doors should cover all single-pane glass win-



dows and doors in the house. Or less expensive do-it-yourself kits are available that cover windows with rigid clear plastic.

Even less expensive is making your own kits by buying the clear plastic in rolls. This works well in unheated rooms that aren't for "show" anyway.

Check for drafts around doors. Doors leading outside or doors to unheated areas need to be properly weatherstripped. A one-eighth-inch crack around a standard door frame can be

responsible for the loss of as much heat as a hole the diameter of a grapefruit.

MANY PEOPLE would like to sell you weatherstripping. Oddly enough, most of it works, though some better than others and some for much longer than others. Even a sand-filled "snake" will cut the draft from underneath the door to an attached garage.

A humidifier can save energy because proper humidity in the air makes you feel more comfortable with less heat. The idea is that you will perspire

less in a properly moist room. And perspiration is what cools you off.

Your own situation may be vastly different, with older people with less ample circulation. You have to be reasonable about saving energy.

But if you use common sense and don't spend much money, you can hardly lose the energy-saving game.

If you have an electrical outlet near your thermostat, you can "fool" the thermostat by putting the light beneath the thermostat. Turn on your nightlight when you go to bed. The light will keep the thermostat warmer than the room, so the thermostat will call for heat less often, saving money.

Other simple, expense-free measures include closing doors and closing off unoccupied rooms. Pull shades and close drapes in the evening.

ON SUNNY days, let the sun shine in, for even that mid-winter sun gives warmth.

Shutters or thermal drapes can be opened during the day, closed at night. And remember, the coldest days are usually the sunniest.

Check to make sure that your furniture or drapes do not obstruct the movement of air from heat registers and cold air returns. Take a vacuum cleaner to the cold air registers at least once a winter.

Be sure all dampers close properly on your clothes dryer vent, range hood and bathroom ventilating fans. When the fireplace isn't in use, make sure the damper is closed and fits tightly.

OTHER THINGS to do require some money, but they will more than pay for themselves in fuel savings.

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