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Hot water heater is energy guzzler

The hot water heater is a heavy user of energy. About 40 percent of every five-minute shower is hot water. But according to the Edison Electric Institute, there are five low- or no-cost remedies available to householders that can help stem the outgoing tide.

1. Install a flow controller in the shower head. This simple device, which costs less than a dollar, reduces the flow of water from about six gallons a minute to three gallons. And installation couldn't be easier — just remove the shower head, push in the flow controller as far as it will go and replace the shower head. A few minutes of work can result in savings of about \$40 a year.

2. Set the temperature of the water heater at 140 degrees or lower. This temperature is adequate for most household needs, even when using an automatic dishwasher. Without a dishwasher, a setting of 120 degrees is sufficient. The higher the setting, the

more energy the hot water heater uses. Experiment to find the lowest temperature that meets your family's needs. It will pay off in money and energy savings.

3. Add an insulating jacket to the water heater. An extra layer of insulation will keep the heat from being lost through the walls of the tank, and save an estimated \$20 a year for electric water heaters and \$10 for gas. Insulation kits and materials are available at hardware stores that do-it-yourselfers can master. Just be sure to follow instructions carefully since it's important that doors, vents and heat valves remain uncovered.

4. Repair leaky faucets promptly. One drop a second works out to 200 gallons of hot water wasted in a month.

5. In homes with washing machines, another easy way to cut back on consumption of costly hot water is by washing clothes in warm water and rinsing in cold.

Paint-mixing tips

The first step toward a perfect paint job is careful paint preparation. If you are planning a painting job using paint you have just purchased, the only preparation you need is careful stirring. But if you are using paint that you have had on hand for a while, you may need to thin, strain and drain the paint.

There is a real trick to stirring paint. Professional painters use a "boxing" technique to be sure colors match when they are using a number of cans of paint.

Here is the way it works. First step is to pour most of the thin top paint into a separate container. Then stir the thick paint until it is smooth and the color is uniform. Then, slowly pour the "thin" paint back into the can, stirring it into the heavy paint. Pour paint back and forth between can and container until the color and

consistency are uniform.

It is often better to stir latex paint rather than have your dealer put it into the mechanical shaker. Shaking can create fine air bubbles which can show up as craters on your walls.

Every painter knows the problem created by dribbles of paint that have settled in the groove around the top of the can. This paint residue then prevents an airtight seal. Solution? Just pound a few nail holes in the bottom of the groove.

Thinning paint can be a problem. Add just an ounce of water or thinner at a time, stirring thoroughly and test the paint on the wall to see if it is right. If it is still too thick, add another ounce. This "ounce-at-a-time" trick will prevent adding too much water or thinner and having to buy more paint to beef up the runny mixture.

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