

GREENWorks

Ideas for a Cleaner Environment

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Don't Let Phantom Power Haunt Your Electric Bills This Winter

The quest for electricity bill savings is certainly an ongoing one, but the recent spike in the cost of electricity has probably put it on the forefront of people's minds. For many New Hampshire electric customers, their rates have increased 17% in the last two months, and that can put a big ding in your purse or wallet.

Reducing energy use in your home saves you money and reduces the pollution that is emitted from non-renewable sources of energy. Even if you have a small renewable energy system to make your own electricity, such as a solar electric system or small wind turbine, or are planning to install one, reducing your electricity load will help – either ensuring you don't overload that system or allowing you to buy a smaller and less expensive system to start with.

There are many things you can do to cut down on the amount of electricity you use in your home, from small changes, like switching to certified energy-efficient appliances, electronics and lighting, to big upgrades, such as installing energy-efficient heat pumps and fixing the insulation and air seal in your home. But one of the simplest solutions that you may not even think of is reducing your "always-on" appliances, or "phantom power" – electricity wasted when electronics are plugged in but not in use.

Almost any product with an external power supply, remote control, continuous display (including an LED), or that charges batteries will draw power continuously, according to the [U.S. Department of Energy's Berkeley Lab](#). The Berkeley Lab notes that the typical American home has 40 products constantly drawing power, amounting to almost 10% of residential electricity use.

To reduce these phantom loads, your first step should be to take an inventory of everything you have plugged in at home. Look for electronics that you don't use (like VCRs or the TV in the guest bedroom) that can stay unplugged for long periods of time. Also, look for appliances with LED displays. (Do you really need to see the time in seven different places in your house?) One very common phantom power user is the cable box. Many people leave it running so the TV will come on instantly, but that cable box uses quite a bit of electricity while your TV is off (just take a look at the [Berkeley Lab table](#)). Once you have the culprits scoped out, you can develop a strategy to unplug.

One common solution is to plug multiple devices into an advanced power strip, and switch the strip on and off depending on when you need them. For example, in the living room, you can add your TV, DVD player, cable box, phone charger and floor lamp into one strip, and when it's time for bed, flip the switch to turn everything off with one action. This works well for clusters of computers and accessories, too. This is also much easier than frequently unplugging and plugging in appliances. Lastly, when shopping for new products, be on the lookout for low standby products. All ENERGY STAR products are designed to have lower standby.

Don't let phantom power haunt your electric bills this winter! A little bit of strategy and creative problem-solving should exorcise the ghostly leaks from your home and keep you more comfortable.

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