

Beat the Heat

This time of year, consumers typically see their electric bills rise with the temperature due to increased use of air conditioning.

Many consumers work their systems harder than necessary, throwing hard-earned money down the drain. Save money during the hot summer by using energy more efficiently.

Use varies among households, but air conditioning systems can account for 40 to 50 percent of your monthly power bill during the hottest months, when demand is at its highest.

Ultimately, only you can control the amount of energy you use. A few simple, free steps can help you take charge of your energy consumption and save you money.

Cost-Free Energy-Saving Tips

To alleviate higher power bills:

- Use ceiling fans to disperse cool air. They can make rooms feel a few degrees cooler than they actually are, allowing you to keep your thermostat at a higher temperature. You can save up to 4 percent of your household energy consumption for each degree you raise your thermostat. Be sure to turn off fans when you leave a room.
- Keep your shades closed during the day. At night, open windows across from one another for cross-ventilation.
- Delay heat-producing activities—such as dishwashing and laundry—until evening. These appliances heat up your home, creating extra work for your air conditioner.
- Keep lamps and TVs away from the thermostat. The heat they produce will cause your air conditioner to run longer, driving up the cost of your power bill.
- Do not obstruct air-conditioning vents. If they are covered, you won't feel the cool air you are paying for.
- Change your filter. That will cut your household energy consumption between 5 and 15 percent. Remember to change your filters at least once a month.
- Close unnecessary openings in your home. Keeping doors, windows and fireplace dampers closed will prevent cool air from escaping and going to waste.
- Use the “auto fan” setting on your thermostat. This will keep your home at a constant temperature and prevent your air conditioner from working harder than needed.
- When you first turn on your air conditioner, do not set the thermostat lower than the desired temperature. That will not cool your home any quicker. It will make the air conditioner run



Need help remembering how long a filter's been in place? When you replace a filter, write the date on the side.

longer to cool it to a lower temperature. This wastes energy.

- Keep storm windows closed during the summer. They provide extra insulation for your windows, helping keep the hot air out and the cool air in.

Invest a Little for Added Savings

Low- to moderate-cost investments could save on overall energy consumption. While these measures require money initially, they eventually pay for themselves in savings:

- Look for a Seasonal Energy Efficiency Rating of 14 or higher when buying a new air conditioner. You should begin to see the difference on your power bill immediately.
- Install a programmable thermostat and save up to 10 percent a year. It can automatically adjust the temperature 10 to 15 percent for the hours your home is unoccupied. Programmable thermostats are available in a range of prices and options.
- When buying ceiling fans, look for an Energy Star model. They move air up to 20 percent more efficiently than conventional models.
- Be sure your home is properly insulated. It will keep your home cooler and reduce cooling costs up to 30 percent. Start in the attic, where temperatures can reach 155 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Seal leaks to save 10 percent or more on energy bills. Caulk and weather strip all seams, cracks and openings to the outside.
- Consider high-performance Energy Star windows if you are building a new home or replacing windows in an older home. They can reduce average cooling costs 15 to 35 percent. Make your power bill one less thing to sweat about. ■

3-Step HVAC Test

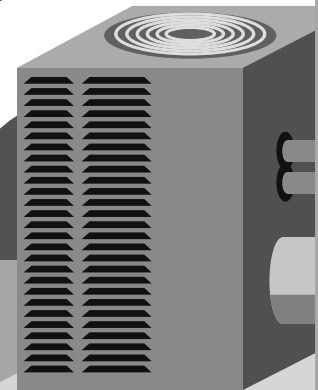
As summer temperatures rise, so do electric bills. Follow these steps to test the efficiency of your HVAC unit.

The outdoor temperature should be above 80 degrees, and you should set your thermostat well below the room temperature to ensure the system runs long enough for this test.

1. Using a digital probe thermometer (about \$12), measure the temperature of the air being pulled into your HVAC filter.
2. Measure the temperature of the air blowing out of your A/C vent.
3. Subtract the A/C vent temperature from the HVAC filter temperature. You should see a difference of about 17 to 20 degrees. If the difference is less than 17 degrees, you may need a licensed technician to check the coolant. If the difference is greater than 20 degrees, your ductwork may need to be inspected for airflow restrictions.



AMERICA'S ELECTRIC
COOPERATIVES



Maintaining an Efficient HVAC System

Clean and service your unit to avoid unwelcome summer breakdowns

By Abby Berry

Ah, summer. Cookouts, swimming pools, camping—it's the perfect time to enjoy the outdoors with family and friends. When coming back indoors, there's nothing better than that cool blast you feel from your home's air conditioning unit.

Your heating, ventilating and air conditioning system is essential to keeping your home comfortable during summer months. If it breaks down, it's also the most expensive equipment to repair or replace. Luckily, you can take simple steps

to lengthen the life of your HVAC system.

- **Change or clean filters.** Dirty filters block airflow, which can greatly decrease the efficiency of your system. The Department of Energy recommends changing or cleaning filters every month or two during the cooling season. If your unit is in constant use or is subjected to dusty conditions or pet hair, check filters more frequently.

- **Clean the HVAC unit.** Outdoor condenser coils can become clogged with pollen, dirt and small debris. Use a hose to spray the HVAC unit once each season to ensure maximum airflow. Warning: Do not use a pressure washer to do this. It can damage the equipment.

- **Clear space around the HVAC unit.** Dryer vents, falling leaves and grass

left behind from the lawnmower can create buildup. Remove any debris around the HVAC unit. If you have foliage near the unit, trim it back at least 2 feet around the condenser to increase airflow.

You should have your HVAC system periodically inspected by a licensed professional. The frequency of inspections depends on the age of your unit, but the U.S. Department of Energy recommends scheduling tuneups during the spring and fall, when contractors aren't as busy.

When HVAC equipment fails, it's inconvenient and uncomfortable—especially during the dog days of summer.

Your HVAC system runs best when it's regularly cleaned and serviced. With a little maintenance along the way, you can add years to your system's lifespan. ■