

Consumer Tool kit

What can consumers do to reduce the effects of high gas prices?

- Qualified low-income households should take advantage of available energy assistance funds. Many eligible consumers currently do not receive funds, however, either because they are not aware of assistance or, if they are, they are reluctant to receive aid.
- Consumers should also familiarize themselves with their gas utility's disconnection policies.
- Consumers should also consider taking advantage of bill payment plans, if offered by their local gas utility, to even out their monthly gas bills. These plans allow consumers to reduce their winter gas bills by paying more during other times of the year when gas consumption is normally much lower. Of course, unlike energy assistance programs, under a bill payment plan consumers are responsible for paying the full cost of gas purchased by the utility.
- Use cost-effective energy efficiency measures.

Energy Efficiency

In responding to higher natural gas prices, a residential consumer can save money by conserving and using natural gas more efficiently. The consumer can follow a seven-step plan:

1. Acquire information on energy conservation,
2. Determine energy use and cost,
3. Have an energy audit done,
4. List all potential projects,
5. Prioritize the list,
6. Take immediate action on the highest-priority energy conservation projects, and
7. Repeat steps one through six for new energy savings as often as possible.

Minimize heat use

The consumer can do the following at little cost :

- (1) stop leaks and reduce heat transfer, control humidity and sunlight to improve heat,
- (2) tighten up loose windows and doors with weather-stripping,
- (3) seal cracks around windows and door frames, where the walls meet the foundation and where pipe or other cable enter through the building,

- (4) replace broken glass panes in windows,
- (5) fix doors and windows to operate and close properly,
- (6) adjust, replace or install automatic door closers,
- (7) cover window air conditioners.

Heating System

The consumer can do the following at little cost: (1) lower the thermostat – keeping the thermostat a bit lower but still comfortable can produce substantial savings,

- (2) when the consumer is not home, turn down the thermostat to a lower setting,
- (3) turn the heating system down to a lower but comfortable setting at bedtime,
- (4) close the curtains at night – keep them open on sunny days,
- (5) minimize use of exhaust fans,
- (6) replace air filters regularly,
- (7) adjust air ducts to maximize heating where needed,
- (8) test and tune-up the heating system – routinely, and
- (9) maximize use of passive solar heating.

Hot Water Heater

The consumer can do the following at little cost:

- (1) insulate the hot water heater,
- (2) lower the temperature setting,
- (3) insulate hot water pipes,
- (4) install water-conserving showerheads,
- (5) install aerators on sink faucets,
- (6) minimize and reduce the amount of hot water used,
- (7) eliminate leaks,
- (8) clean out sediment from hot water tank – 2 to 5 gallons every six months.

Cooking

The consumer can do the following at little or no cost:

- (1) turn equipment on when ready to cook including preheating,
- (2) use only as high a temperature as is needed – medium or low heat,
- (3) open oven doors at a minimum,
- (4) cook larger volumes of food and reheat,
- (5) adjust the flames so the tips just touch the pot or pan,
- (6) do not overuse the exhaust fan by operating it more than needed.

Washing/Drying

The consumer can do the following at little cost:

- (1) reduce the water temperature from a hot water heater to the minimum needed,
- (2) wash a full load.

Prioritize the list

As a rule of thumb, the consumer should pick projects that get the largest “bang for the dollar,” that is, the most natural gas saved for a given amount of money. This analysis should take into account the consumer’s lifestyle and needs. As an example, a family of five with three teenagers that take 30-minute showers would probably find installing water conservation showerheads is a good strategy. On the other hand, a single-member household that takes baths would probably not find this strategy to be cost-effective.

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