Energy-saving tips while at home

To help prevent the spread of COVID-19, government officials have issued a stay-at-home order throughout our region. People working from home—as well as students of all ages in the house—can mean an increase in energy use. You can help take charge of your energy use with these simple home energy-efficiency tips.

Living Spaces

Concerned about the virus in your home? During this time of uncertainty, you can help keep your air cleaner by cracking windows or opening the fresh-air damper on your furnace intake to let in more outside air. Also, continuously run your furnace fan at a low speed and change furnace filters often.

Set your thermostat no higher than 68 degrees. Also lower it an extra five degrees at night unless you have a heat pump.

Keep heat registers free of obstructions. Drapes, furniture and plants can all block air flow.

Close doors to unoccupied rooms if you have zoned heat like baseboards. You'll save space-heating costs. Do not shut off registers or block returns with a forced air system. It will increase fan energy usage and may cause damage to your equipment.

Turn off unnecessary lights. Use sunlight during the daytime if possible. Make sure your exterior lights are off during the day.

Let the sun warm your home. Open your drapes/blinds on south-facing windows to let in sunlight. Close them in rooms that receive no sun to insulate against cold drafts. At night, close coverings to retain heat.

Clean or replace your furnace filters. If you do not have filters on hand, it's still possible to order them for pick-up from local stores. Or, enroll in Avista's Furnace Filter Program to receive reminders, get valuable coupons and have new filters delivered right to your door. Go to **myavista.com/changemyfilter**

Make sure your fireplace is used properly. If you are using another heat source for your home, close off the damper on your fireplace to avoid energy loss up the flue.

Electronics

Turn off TVs and other electronics after use. They may continue to consume power even when appearing off (amounts up to as much as 10% of your annual electricity usage). Also, plug your home electronics into a single power strip so you can switch it off and cut power to all of them at once.

Activate power-saving settings on your game console. Adjusting these settings on your console, and using power strips, can address the phantom loads associated with standby modes. Also, some game consoles use more energy than other dedicated devices to stream HD movies. Check the manufacturer's website for more information.

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Kitchen

Set your fridge temperature between 37 and 40 degrees. Keep the freezer section at 5 degrees. Also vacuum exposed coils located on the back or underneath the appliance. Regular cleaning can improve efficiency up to 15% or more.

Set your stand-alone freezer to 0 degrees. A full freezer also retains cold better than an empty one.

Don't put warm foods directly into the refrigerator. Allow hot foods to cool, then refrigerate. Cooked meats, however, should be refrigerated immediately.

Always use a sink stopper or dishpan. Washing or rinsing dishes under running hot water wastes energy.

Run a full dishwasher. If your dishwasher has an automatic energy-savings/cool-dry cycle, use that setting. Otherwise, turn it off after the final rinse and let dishes air dry.

Water Heating

Set your water heater temperature to 120 degrees. That's plenty hot and won't scald. Do not set the water temperature below 115 degrees to prevent Legionnaires' disease.

Take short showers. You'll use less hot water than a bath.

Fix leaky faucets. A small drip can waste a bathtub full of hot water each month.

Laundry

Wash only full loads of clothes. Wash full loads using the proper water levels. Some experts also advise washing clothes in hot water to reduce the chance of virus strands clinging to your clothes (this may increase your energy consumption).

Clean your dryer's lint filter after every load. Clogged filters increase drying time.

Don't overload your dryer. Clothes will take longer to dry.

Humidity Level

Add humidity to your home if it has under 30% relative humidity. Keeping your home's humidity between 40% and 50% will make you feel warmer and reduce the chance of viral spread. If you don't own a device that displays the humidity level inside your home, here are ways to increase humidity indoors as well as how to assess your relative humidity.

How to increase humidity. You can increase humidity indoors using a humidifier. If you don't own one or prefer to save energy, however, you can place water-filled vases on sunny windowsills. The sunshine will slowly evaporate the water, releasing moisture into the air. Hang your clothes to dry inside your home to take advantage of incidental moisture release. A steamy kettle on the stove beats using a microwave.

THE ICE CUBE HUMIDITY TEST

1. Place two or three ice cubes into a glass, add tap water and stir.

2. Wait three to four minutes and then observe the glass.

3. Examine the outside of the glass. If moisture does not form, the air is too dry. If the outside of the glass shows a fog of water vapor, the relative humidity is correct. If water has condensed on the outside of the glass with drops rolling down, the relative humidity is high.

NOTE: Conduct this test in any room where humidity is a concern except the kitchen, as cooking vapors may produce inaccurate results.