



## Your Home's Energy Use

**How We Use Energy in Our Homes** Heating accounts for the biggest chunk of a typical utility bill.

The first step to taking a wholehouse energy efficiency approach is to find out which parts of your house use the most energy. A home energy audit will pinpoint those areas and suggest the most effective measures for cutting your energy costs. You can conduct a simple home energy audit yourself, you can contact your local utility, or you can call an independent energy auditor for a more comprehensive examination.

### Energy Auditing Tips

- Check the insulation levels in your attic, exterior and basement walls, ceilings, floors, and crawl spaces.
- Check for holes or cracks around your walls, ceilings, windows, doors, light and plumbing fixtures, switches, and electrical outlets that can leak air into or out of your home.
- Check for open fireplace dampers.
- Make sure your appliances and heating and cooling systems are properly maintained. Check your owner's manuals for the recommended maintenance.
- Study your family's lighting needs and use patterns, paying special attention to high-use areas such as the living room, kitchen, and outside lighting. Look for ways to use lighting controls—like occupancy sensors, dimmers, or timers—to reduce lighting energy use, and replace standard (also called incandescent) light bulbs and fixtures with compact or standard fluorescent lamps.

### Formulating Your Plan

After you have identified where your home is losing energy, assign priorities by asking yourself a few important questions:

- How much money do you spend on energy?
- Where are your greatest energy losses?
- How long will it take for an investment in energy efficiency to pay for itself in energy cost savings?
- Do the energy saving measures provide additional benefits that are important to you (for example, increased comfort from installing double-paned, efficient windows)?
- How long do you plan to own your current home?
- Can you do the job yourself or will you need to hire a contractor?
- What is your budget and how much time do you have to spend on maintenance and repair?

Once you assign priorities to your energy needs, you can form a whole house efficiency plan. Your plan will provide you with a strategy for making smart purchases and home improvements that maximize energy efficiency and save the most money. Another option is to get the advice of a professional. Many utilities conduct energy audits for free or for a small charge. For a fee, a professional contractor will analyze how well your home's energy systems work together and compare the analysis to your utility bills. He or she will use a variety of equipment such as blower doors, infrared cameras, and surface thermometers to find leaks and drafts. After gathering information about your home, the contractor or auditor will give you a list of recommendations for cost-effective energy improvements and enhanced comfort and safety. A good contractor will also calculate the return on your investment in high-efficiency equipment compared with standard equipment.

### Tips for Finding a Contractor

- Ask neighbors and friends for recommendations
- Look in the Yellow Pages
- Focus on local companies
- Look for licensed, insured contractors
- Get three bids with details in writing
- Ask about previous experience
- Check references
- Check with the Better Business Bureau