

# Save energy and money on your next utility bill

BY BOBBI IGNELZI  
Copley News Service

Dee and Robert Simmons are trying to do their share. As conscientious energy consumers, the couple has made several changes to their home and in their day-to-day routine to help lower their energy bills.

Robert, a retired law professor, and Dee have owned their single-level 2,600-square-foot, 40-year-old home since 1976, during which time they raised five sons.

The Simmonses recently replaced their old kitchen refrigerator with a new energy-efficient one, and are using compact fluorescent bulbs in most of their lighting fixtures. The gas clothes dryer is used minimally since Dee often hangs the laundry outdoors.

Their swimming pool is covered and not heated, and Dee has scheduled the pump to operate during off-peak energy hours every other day.

Their biggest energy expenditure is heating and cooling. They use their furnace often during winter months, since Robert likes the house quite warm. Their central air conditioning is used on hot summer days, but turned off at night, when they rely on ceiling fans for cooling. Their windows and sliding glass doors are dual-glazed and tinted to help keep out sunlight and heat.

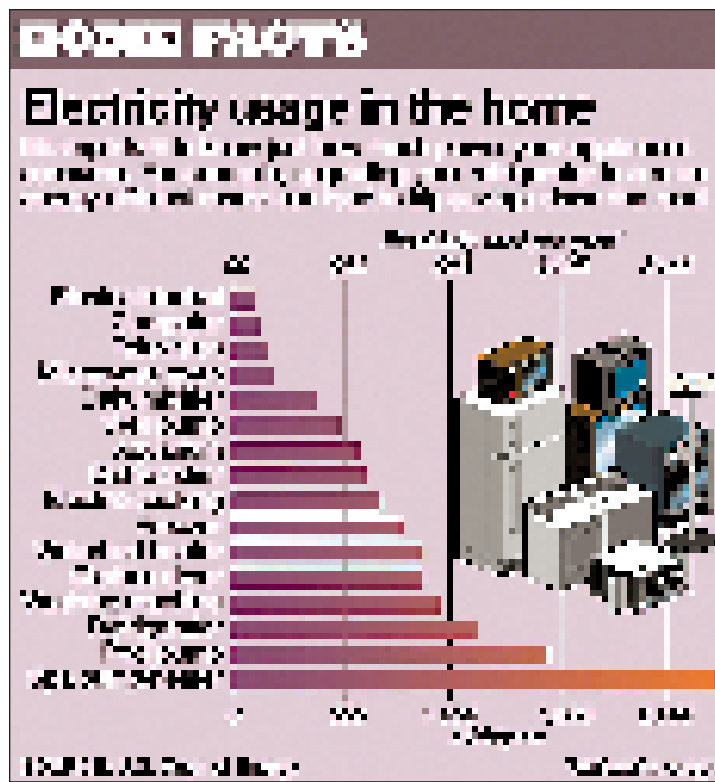
## ENERGY-SAVING RECOMMENDATIONS

- Unplug the freezer in the garage.
- If you can't part with the freezer, at least freeze jugs of water and store them in the freezer to help fill it up.

A full refrigerator or freezer is more energy efficient.

- Add some ceiling insulation in the attic.
- Replace the old air conditioning unit with a high-efficiency model.
- Put an insulation blanket around the water heater and reduce the temperature setting.
- Insulate hot water pipes.
- Hire a contractor to "duct blast" the air ducts to free them of debris that can prevent heating and cooling efficiency.
- Insulate the furnace coils to hold in warm air.
- Remove the vent grills and vacuum out.
- Leave windows open at night to capture the natural cooling. Leave windows closed and covered during the day to keep the cooled air inside during the summer.

- mer.
- Air conditioner: If you plan to be away from home for several days, turn off the AC.
- Keeping cool: Use fans to cool your house. If you can't, set your air conditioner to 78 degrees.
- Task lighting: When you turn on the lights, don't turn on every light in the room; use task lighting — desk lamps and counter lamps.
- Power strips: Put the TV, VCR, the computer, and other appliances that use energy even when they are turned off on a power strip. Then turn them off from the strip when not in use.
- The water heater: Lower your water heater thermostat, and every three months drain a quart from the tank to remove sediment and improve the heater's efficiency.



- Laundry: Wash clothes in cold water and keep the dryer's lint trap and vent clean.
- The refrigerator: Turn down that thermostat on the refrigerator, and if you have an older model, you must defrost. Defrost often.

## ECLECTIC

### Furniture trends reflects the region

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Ringl notes that many people these days are brightening up their neutral-toned rooms with rich shades of red. However, according to both Ringl and Hessler, it looks like the new black is deep chocolate brown, especially when paired with pink or sky blue. Don't worry about committing to the trend — that's where slipcovers and accent pieces come in, said Hessler.

Not a slipcover fan? You can commit to something long-wearing and comfortable without sacrificing color by going for leather — a hot seller for northern Lower Michigan living rooms this year and versatile because it can com-

ment more or less formal spaces. Though chocolate is the must-have for most of her customers, Hessler said she also sells a lot of leather in black, red and green tones.

Color isn't for upholstery alone, according to Todd. He said more people are bucking the traditional nude washes on wood furniture, requesting instead a two-toning process that sets a wood stain under paint. The paint is rubbed so the stain can shine through on certain areas of the piece, giving the piece a distressed, textured look.

Black paint over a warm, cherry stain or white over a yellow or natural stain are hot combinations, he said.

Although two-toning can be used on dining tables, chairs, end tables, sofa and bed frames, Todd added, "An entertainment center is perfect for it because it doesn't match the other furniture pieces. It's a focal point, so why not make it stylish and use it to bring

out the color in the room?"

#### Material world

While oak used to be an Up North favorite, Todd said his clients are now going for pine and birch pieces because of the soft, casual feeling they provide. Those looking for a tighter grain, which lends itself to a more polished look, are clamoring for woods like hickory, cherry, maple and birch.

He noted that it's common to find lots of particle board among home office furniture pieces and plywood with veneers on home entertainment centers or the backs of armoires simply because many people need to adjust shelves to accommodate TVs. However, if you can afford it, genuine hardwoods are best.

How to tell if you're getting quality pieces? Turn the selected piece over, looking at its structure and hardware. Is it nailed together or does it employ

the quality mortise and tenon construction? Is it solid quality wood or are parts plywood?

"Even if it says it's all wood, it might not be," said Todd. "Rather than asking if it's all wood, ask the salesperson which part of this is solid wood and what part isn't. If the salesperson is honest, he'll tell you."

"There aren't any big secrets in furniture anymore because we've learned so much about

technology and engineering," said Ringl. "Just touch, try, open drawers and ask a lot of questions."

"Ask for quality points," said Todd. "If the furniture is worth talking about, the salesperson will know the quality points and be able to talk to you about them."

A reputable store will likely offer a warranty or guarantee, as well. If a customer isn't happy with a piece of furniture purchased at Betsie Bay Furniture, for example —

even if it's a special order — Hessler said they can return it.

Although that happens rarely, Hessler said it gives customers peace of mind when they make a purchase.

"Furniture is such an emotional purchase," she said. "It's in your home. You must be happy with it."

Lynda Twardowski is a local freelance writer.

## Tile grout tip

Cracked and stained grout not only is an eyesore, but can lead to damage hidden beneath the surface of the tile, as well.

Improve the appearance of the grout and prevent water damage by installing a new layer of grout.

Start by removing an eighth of an inch of the uppermost layer of existing grout with a grout saw (a tool about the size of a toothbrush that is used to remove grout).

Next, rinse the area thoroughly with fresh water to remove dust or loose grout. Apply a new layer of grout using a rubber float, wiping off the excess with a damp sponge.

Finish the job by polishing the haze that remains with a soft dry cloth. Seal the new grout after it has had a few weeks to cure.



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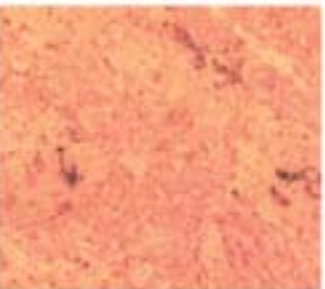


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