Patriot Plumbing & Heating, Inc
113 Garfield Street
Quincy, MA 02169
(617) 472-3500
www.patriotplumbingheating.com

Lower Your Home Heating Bill This Winter

With oil prices continuing to rise, home heating bills will surely be higher. Tom Silva, PBS's general contractor for "This Old House" offers tips for using less energy in your home and possibly decreasing your bill by 30 percent.

Service your furnace at least once a year
The biggest thing is making sure that your gas or oil furnace is serviced and cleaned at least once a year. Simply changing an oil furnace filter can make a tremendous difference in efficiency. Yet many people neglect such routine maintenance.

United States Department of Energy statistics show that 44 percent of the average home's energy use is devoted to heating and cooling. So give your water heater a tune up as well. The appliance accounts for nearly 15 percent of your home energy use.

Insulation is key
Your furnace and water heater burn a lot of energy to heat water. Don't let hot water cool off in uninsulated pipes. Cover them with tube-shaped insulation. Similarly, make sure that heating and cooling ductwork in your basement, crawl space and attic is insulated and that the joints are taped.

In cold climates, vents for appliances like clothes dryers and stoves should have louvers that allow vents to be closed. Lots of times, these are stuck open. When that happens, cold air rushes in when they are not in use.

Priority one when insulating is the roof, where rising heat tries to escape your home. If you already have insulation, consider increasing the amount in your attic. It's basically adding another blanket on your bed. But be sure you don't separate insulation layers with a vapor barrier. Also, it's very, very important that the more you insulate your attic, the more you must ventilate. The attic is a space that you don't want to heat. Ideally, you'd want the underside of the roof to be as cool as the outside.

About one-third of the air leaking in and out of your home passes through the ceiling, walls, and floors. To fix, use blow-in or spray-in insulation, which is available for uninsulated walls.

Install weather strips on doors and windows
For more savings, add weather stripping to your windows and doors. You can hire a professional or use a range of do-it-yourself products. Windows should be caulked on three sides, leaving the bottom to provide an escape for moisture.

When working on doors, add weather-stripping to the top, sides, and bottom threshold. You can seal the space under the door with a strip or even a removable “draft snake.”

Heat-loss through windows accounts for 10 to 25 percent of your home heating bill. So invest in quality storm windows. You'll pay a little to save a lot. They are very, very efficient. Instead of spending $800 or $1,000 for a new window, spend a couple hundred dollars or less and get a good-quality storm window. You'll save a lot of money. And don't forget storm windows for your basement windows.

Drafts can add up to higher energy use and a chilly winter. When you get cold air blowing across your feet, you're cold. In spring or fall caulk the outside of your home. Check under and over windows, beside windows and doors, and areas where siding meets trim. Gaps are areas where air will enter and cause cooling drafts. An average house might take three tubes of caulk. You can save an enormous amount of money by caulking cracks. You should use latex rather than silicone-based caulk, which cannot be painted. And for gaps too large for caulking, use spray-foam products.

Also, lock window sash locks to close windows more tightly.

Lower thermostats 3-4 degrees
To further reduce heating costs, try lowering your thermostat. Three or four degrees can make a big difference. You can install a programmable thermostat that will lower and raise the temperature at convenient times. The easy-to-install thermostats can be set to drop temperatures just before bedtime or warm the house in the morning before you rise. The D.O.E. estimates you can save 10 percent a year on heating and cooling bills just by turning your thermostat down 10 to 15 percent for eight hours while you sleep.

You can also increase energy savings by implementing home heating zones. You can heat your home by levels, keeping the first floor warmer during the day and the second floor warmer at night. If you don't have a zone heating system, try to turn off your radiators. Steam radiators usually have a lever so that you can shut off that radiator, close that room, and not waste heat.

Remove your air conditioner
Remove window air conditioning units in the fall. They are drafty, and they suck the heat right out of your house. You have to do something to stop that draft. If you can't remove your air conditioner, use an insulated jacket that goes on the exterior. They are still drafty but better than nothing.

Upgrade Appliances
Today's appliances are much more efficient than their predecessors, so consider upgrading. Your stove, for example, is insulated around the perimeter to keep heat inside. A cheap stove has less insulation, so it doesn't work as well. Newer air conditioning units use less energy to generate cold air. Appliance energy use adds up: The average refrigerator is responsible for nearly 10 percent of the average home's total energy use. Examine off-hour energy costs. Lots of towns have what they call after-hour use where your energy costs are more efficient after peak hours. If available, these hours can be a good time to do laundry or run the dishwasher. Explore getting a tankless water-heating unit. The water heater in the basement is making hot water, and keeping it at that warm temperature all day while you're at work. Plus you're paying for the water to stay warm while you're sleeping. On-demand tankless units cost more than conventional water heaters, but you can recoup the savings by heating water only when you need it.