

Home Energy Saving Tips for San Antonio Residents

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Rising fuels costs have San Antonio homeowners searching for ways to conserve energy.

According to the U. S. Department of Energy, heating and cooling accounts for 56% of the energy use in a typical U. S. home, making it the largest energy expense for most homes. With fall and winter coming on, many San Antonio residents are looking for ways to make their homes more fuel efficient. Here are a few tips:

SEAL THE ENVELOPE

The exterior of a home is also called the envelope. The ceiling, walls, and the foundation or floors make up the barrier between outside and inside. It is important to seal any gaps or cracks where air can pass either into or out of the home, such as leaking weather stripping around doors and windows, and around electrical and plumbing fixtures. Most air leaks are in the attic, so it is important to give it special attention. Foam, caulk and weather stripping are the most common materials used for sealing. Sealing a structure in this manner is a task that many homeowners can do themselves, making sure to follow the product manufacturer's application and safety instructions.

INSULATE

Making sure the home is adequately insulated will also save energy in the home. Insulation is designed to be an effective barrier to heat transfer. The easiest place to add insulation is in the attic. Fiberglass and cellulose are the most common types of attic insulation. Insulating products and installation tools are readily available, but in most cases it's a job best left to professionals. Remember, before insulating, it is important to first seal the air leaks, as insulation works best when air is not moving around it.

MAINTAIN THE HEATING SYSTEM

Some of the basic maintenance jobs can be performed by homeowners. Changing the air filters, and keeping the areas around the heating and cooling equipment clear of debris are both critical for safe and efficient operation of the system. If one is inclined, a home owner can even inspect their duct system for any air leaks by turning the indoor blower on and feeling for leaks. However, dismantling the equipment and any cleaning to the equipment is best left to a licensed professional contractor.

On a central gas furnace, the heating contractor should clean and adjust the burners, test for gas leaks, inspect the heat exchanger for cracks or holes using an infrared camera for diagnostic accuracy, inspect the flue pipe and combustion air opening, check the pilot flame and all of the safety features of the appliance. The blower motor should be checked and lubricated according to the manufacturer's instructions. The contractor should also make the owner aware of any code compliance or safety issues. He should also offer energy saving tips, including furnace replacement options for those units that are old or in need of expensive repairs.

Wall furnaces also require professional cleaning every year. It is best to hire a contractor who specializes in wall furnace service and maintenance since many service companies today do not work on them.

Heat pumps and system that utilize electric resistance heat should be maintained as well. Electric heat strips should be inspected for safe and efficient operation. Of course, proper filter maintenance is critical. The heat pump heating cycle should be checked, as well as refrigerant levels.

Proper thermostat operation should be part of a professional heating inspection. Electronic thermostats are generally more accurate than "mercury bulb" types, and there are control options that include timers so that the temperature setting can automatically adjust for times when the home is unoccupied. The temperature setting is a matter of personal preference. Just be aware, in the winter time, the higher the temperature is set, the more fuel the system will consume and that energy consumption will be reflected on the utility bill. The same goes in the summertime. The lower the temperature is set, the higher the utility bills will be.

It is always a good idea to have a working relationship with a qualified, licensed and insured heating and air conditioning contractor who specializes in residential service and maintenance. Most companies like this offer maintenance programs to their clients. The best programs include regular maintenance, priority service response, discounts on repairs and even equipment warranty enhancements.