Owner's Manual

Electric Meters Work While You are on Vacation

"We've been on vacation for three weeks. Why didn't we see a reduction in our electric bill?" "We are rarely home. How could we be using this much electricity?"

These questions are common, especially in the summer months. How can electric bills drop so little when the house is left empty?

Set-and-Forget Appliances

With the advances in technology, homes are equipped with more electric appliances than ever.

Most people don't pull the plug on their major appliances when they leave town because of the trouble of connecting, reconnecting and resetting their clocks. Yet, there can be big savings if appliances are left unplugged in an empty house.

Devices that owners "set and forget" have a constant power draw. The instant-on feature on a VCR, DVD player, computer, television, satellite dish, cable box or stereo consumes between 2 to 10 kilowatt hours of electricity ($0.12 to $0.60) per month.

While the cost of running each individual appliance may not seem like much, multiply that charge by the number of appliances in a home and the sum can be significant.

Refrigerators and Freezers

A refrigerator accounts for a large amount of the energy consumed in the average American home. The appliance is very sensitive to the room temperature around it. Contrary to the common notion, door opening accounts for less than 20 percent of a refrigerator's energy use.

To save on electricity charges, concentrate on providing adequate ventilation in the kitchen especially when the house is unoccupied. High temperatures force the refrigerator to work harder and can increase its energy use as much as 50 percent during the summer.

Avoid emptying the refrigerator before leaving town. A nearly-empty fridge will have to work harder, increasing its energy consumption.

If the refrigerator is completely empty, set the thermostat to the highest (warmest) setting to reduce energy consumption 40 percent. Do not leave an empty unit unplugged as mold and mildew problems can occur.

Many homeowners have a second refrigerator or freezer in the basement. Depending on the efficiency, a unit can consume 40 to 150 kilowatt hours ($2.40 to $9.00) per month.

Automatic defrost freezers will use about 120 to 140 kilowatt hours ($7.20 to $8.40) per month.

Waterbeds

A conventional waterbed uses about 125 kilowatt hours ($7.50) per month. It is easy to overlook a waterbed as a major energy user yet the heater can run for more than eight hours a day.

Because these beds take time to regain their operating temperatures, it may not be convenient to unplug them when leaving town for a few days. Instead, consider reducing the temperature 10 degrees.

Be sure to cover your waterbed with a heavy blanket or bedspread. Leaving the mattress uncovered can double the cost to heat it.

Pumps

Pool and spa pumps use 25 to 200 kilowatt hours ($1.50 to $12.00) per month. Keeping those tropical fish happy in an aquarium can use between 10 and 150 kilowatt hours ($0.60 to $9.00). Well and sump pumps running efficiently use approximately 5 to 20 kilowatt hours ($0.30 to $1.20) per month.

Water Heaters

Water heaters also continue to work when the house is empty. A

Common Set-and-Forget Devices

- Answering machine
- Aquarium
- Cable TV box
- Computer, fax, modem
- Cordless phone
- Cordless vacuum
- Garage door opener
- Indoor "evening light"
- Outdoor security light
- Pool, spa, well pumps
- Refrigerator, freezer
- VCR, DVD player
- Water heater

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standby water heater uses approximately 50 to 150 kilowatt hours ($3.00 to $9.00) per month. An under sink water heater uses 8 to 20 kilowatt hours ($0.48 to $1.20).

Heating and Cooling

Many homeowners have realized how easy it is to save on heating and cooling costs by installing an automatic thermostat. Yet, leaving on vacation without readjusting the settings–especially during triple-digit summer days or a February cold snap–can bring a surprise with the next utility bill.

Learn how to program the thermostat before heading out of town. Some devices have a special vacation setting that can be set with the flick of a switch. Other styles require more effort.

Be sure to check the settings on the unit after reprogramming it. An incorrectly programmed thermostat is a problem that will continue to occur every hour the house is empty.

Even when the thermostat turns off a heat pump, the unit's crankcase heater still heats the lubricant and refrigerant. Newer heat pumps with thermostat controls still draw 20 kilowatt hours per month.

While a heat pump's crankcase heater can be turned off at the circuit breaker or disconnect switch, homeowners must make sure to allow it to reheat the refrigerant-lubricant for a few hours before restarting the heat pump or the compressor may be damaged.

Some returning vacationers may find that waiting two or more hours before turning on a cooling system is not worth the energy savings; others who are gone over an extended period of time may find that a lower electricity bill is worth the inconvenience.

During the cold winter months, a vacant house with a thermostat set at 55 degrees may use more energy than an occupied house set at 65 degrees.

Cooking, bathing, clothes drying and other "people" activities help raise the temperature in a home. An empty house's heating system must work harder to maintain the 55 degree temperature.

PUD Wins National Award

Northern Wasco County PUD is one of 48 of the nation's more than 2,000 public power utilities to earn Reliable Public Power Provider (RP3) recognition from the American Public Power Association for providing consumers with the highest degree of reliable and safe electric service.

The RP3 recognizes public power utilities that demonstrate proficiency in four key disciplines: reliability, safety, training and system improvement.

The criteria within each category are based on sound business practices and represent a utility-wide commitment to the safe and reliable delivery of electricity.

"We are thrilled to be recognized as a national RP3 designee," says Dwight Langer, General Manager of Northern Wasco County PUD. "This is the first year Northern Wasco PUD has entered this national competition which provides an outside, independent perspective of our efforts.

"We look forward to continuing to find ways to improve our operations and service to the community. It also allows us to evaluate the quality of reliability, safety, training and system improvement programs and to raise standards as time goes on."

Community Calendar

AUGUST

4
Music in the Park presents Lee Highway, bluegrass and old-time music, 6:00 p.m., at The Dalles City Park.

10-12
Cruise The Gorge/Neon Nights
Friday: Neon Cruise & Park Lot Party, 6:00 p.m., Downtown The Dalles
Saturday: "Show in the Shade" 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at Sorosis Park.
Neon Nights Classic Music Festival, 6:00 p.m. at Riverfront Park.
Sunday: Dallesport Drags, 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at The Dalles Airport.

16-19
Wasco County Fair
Carnival, 4-H and FFA exhibits, rodeo, demolition derby, music and dancing at the fairgrounds in Tygh Valley.

18
Music in the Park presents Gorge Winds a 50-piece concert band, 6:00 p.m. at The Dalles City Park.

28
Northern Wasco County PUD Board Meeting, 6 p.m., 2345 River Road, The Dalles.

Non profit community organizations are encouraged to list events. Please call 298-3302.