

# Cutting Your Water Heater Costs

Water heating is the third largest energy expense in your home. There are four ways to cut your water heating bills: use less hot water, turn down the thermostat on your water heater, insulate your water heater, and buy a new, more efficient water heater.



## **Conserve Water**

A family of four, each showering for 5 minutes a day, uses 700 gallons of water a week. This is enough for a 3-year supply of drinking water for one person. You can cut that amount in half simply by using low-flow non-aerating showerheads and faucets.

## **Lower Your Water Heater Thermostat**

Although some manufacturers set water heaters at 140°F, 120°F is satisfactory for most household needs. If your dishwasher does not have a booster heater, lowering the water-heating temperature is not recommended. Also, many dishwasher detergents are formulated to clean effectively at 140°F and may not perform adequately at lower temperatures. When you plan to be away from home for an extended period of time (at least 3 days), turning the water heater thermostat down to the lowest setting can help you save money.

## **Install a Timer**

Another possibility for electric water heaters is installing a timer that can automatically turn the heater off at night and on in the morning. At a \$30 selling price and a do-it-yourself installation, a simple timer may pay for itself in energy saved in about 1 year.

## **Insulate Hot-Water Pipes and the Storage Tank**

When you turn on a hot-water faucet during cold weather, it may take several seconds for the water to become hot. This happens because the water travels through pipes from the water heater to the faucet, and some of the pipes may pass through unheated sections of the house, such as the basement. As a result, the hot water loses some of its heat to the surrounding space.

This heat loss can be reduced by insulating hot water --especially in unheated areas. Eventually the water will cool, but it will remain warmer much longer inside insulated pipes. Easy-to-install, pre-cut blankets (or jackets) for electric water heaters are widely available and range in cost from \$10 to \$20. Installation is more difficult on gas- and oil-fired heaters. Ask your local furnace installer for instructions.

## **Use Off-Peak Power to Heat Water**

Most consumers use more hot water in the evenings and mornings than at other times of the day. For those who have an electric water heater, this usage contributes to the electric utility company's "peak load," or the largest amount of power demand that they have to meet on a daily basis. Some utilities charge lower rates at "off-peak" times and higher rates at "on-peak" times.

## **Evaluate A New Water Heater**

If your water heater is at least 7 years old, you should carefully evaluate your water-heating needs and investigate the types of heaters that could replace your current one. Most new water heater models have factory-installed traps. Some are well insulated and do not need blankets.

If you heat with electricity and you have an unshaded, south-facing location (such as a roof) on your property, consider a solar water heater. When shopping for a solar water heater, watch for systems certified by the Solar Rating and Certification Corporation (SRCC) or the Florida Solar Energy Center (FSEC).

*Source: U.S. Dept. of Energy*