Where does the energy in your home … go?
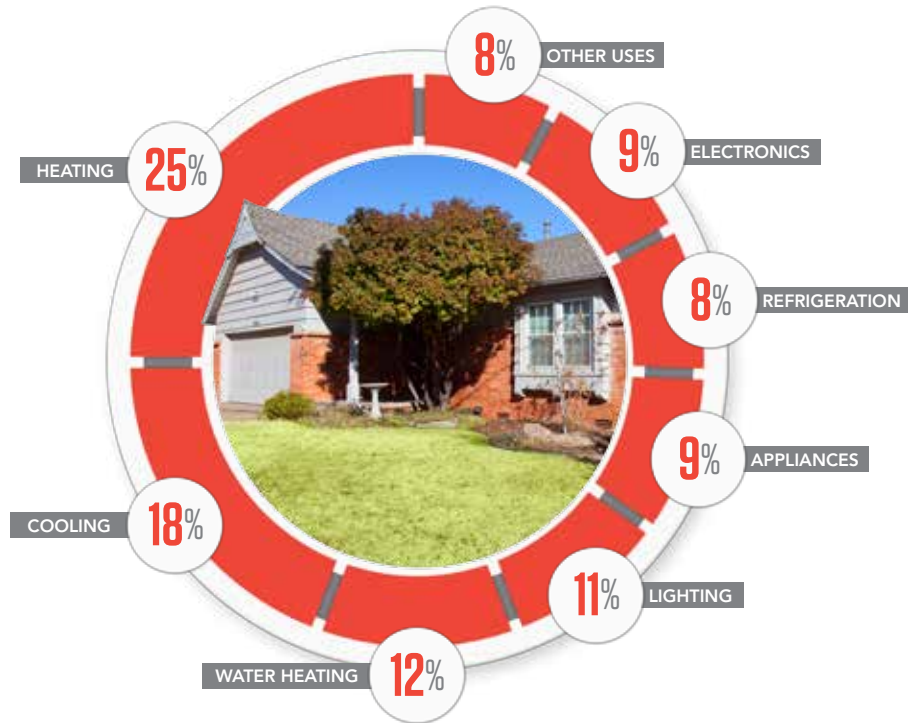
You want all the energy in your home to serve your family's needs, from heating and cooling to lighting and entertainment. But truth is, some of it's lost—from leaks to vampire drainage to inefficient usage. That's why it's important to be as efficient as possible. So let's look at how energy is used in a typical home and, more importantly, ways we can be more efficient and save money.

8% OTHER USES
9% ELECTRONICS
8% REFRIGERATION
9% APPLIANCES
11% LIGHTING
12% WATER HEATING
18% COOLING
25% HEATING

25% HEATING

Typically, heating is a quarter of your total bill. No surprise: our first suggestion is to simply turn down the thermostat—even a couple of degrees—to save money.

A typical home leaks as much as 30% of its air, so caulking and weatherstripping doors and windows can reduce heating and air conditioning usage by as much as 20%. You'll find other major leakage areas include air ducts, plumbing utilities and wall penetrations, attic entrances, wall outlets and recessed light fixtures. Also, if you're in the market for a new heating system, consider the highest-energy-efficiency model you can afford. The higher the rating, the more efficient the performance.

18% COOLING

If you can replace your old central air conditioner with a new high-efficiency unit and a SEER rating of 13 or more, you can save at least 25% on your cooling bills. But just like a heating system, don't replace your current system until near the end of its life, and replace them in spring and fall, when the demand isn't as great. And always remember to change your air filters at least twice a year—if not twice a month when the A/C is in heavy use.

During cooler weather let in outside air instead of operating the A/C. Also, draw blinds or drapes to block the sunlight during the hottest part of the day. Even turn the A/C up a few degrees and use a fan (remember, fans cool people, not rooms, so use it in the room you're occupying). Remember, sunlight falling on a window air conditioning unit increases its workload, so when you have a choice, locate these units on the shady side of the house.

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12% WATER HEATING

There's a lot you can do to make heating water more efficient and less costly. First, keep your system properly maintained. Once or twice a year, drain a bucket of water out of the heater tank to eliminate sediment which can insulate the tank from the heating element and waste energy.

Also, an inexpensive insulation kit can keep heat from being lost through the walls of the tank. But make sure to read the instructions so you don't insulate over any doors, vents or relief valves. What's more, lowering your water heater temperature setting from 140° F to 120° can reduce your heating energy bill by more than 10%.

11% LIGHTING

Of course, the easiest way to save money on lighting is to turn them off. But another effective way is to use the lowest wattage bulb to accomplish your needs. For instance, CFL bulbs will give an incandescent bulb's light, while using 75% less electricity. It's true. And now that LED bulb technology is more affordable, it's the way to go. In fact, you would have to buy five times as many incandescent bulbs to equal the life of a single LED bulb.

9% APPLIANCES

When buying appliances, look for the Energy Star label. You'll find the efficiency rating for each appliance, and the cost to run it based on averages from the U.S. Department of Energy.

When you're cooking, use your microwave when possible, they draw less than half the power of conventional ovens and cook faster. Also, consider cooking in portable electric appliances such as a frying pan, grill or toaster oven for smaller portions. On average, these use only about one-third of the electric power of an oven broiler. When it comes to the laundry, cold water can get your clothes just as clean, so you don't have to pay to warm the water. Sort laundry and schedule washes so that a complete job can be done with a fuller load and fewer cycles. Overall, dishwashers use less water than washing dishes by hand. And most new units have internal booster heaters, so that you can set your water heater to let your dishwasher do the super heating for those sticky dishes.

8% REFRIGERATION

If you have a second refrigerator, and can afford to unplug it—do it. It's probably very expensive to run. If you have an older unit, try vacuuming and cleaning the condenser coils of refrigerators and freezers every three months or so, you'll find them in the back or at the bottom of cabinets. Dust-covered coils impair the efficiency of the compressor and can increase energy drain.

9% ELECTRONICS

Turn off electronic units to help eliminate the standby power drain some devices use even when they are in the "off" position. It's easier to use a power strip as a central "turn off" when you're finished using equipment—so you can turn off more units at one time. Also, remember to unplug any battery chargers or power adapters when electronics are fully charged or disconnected from the charger. Some people turn off the lights in the house and look for the tiny red lights on electronics that mean vampire drain could still be occurring.

When it comes to TVs, an LCD TV typically uses less electricity than a plasma TV, while rear projection TVs are typically more efficient than LCDs and plasmas. And turn off your video game consoles when you're not using them. Most game consoles use as much energy in the "idle" mode as in the "active" mode. The annual electricity usage for a game console that is always on is nearly 10 times as much as a console that's turned off when not in use.

8% OTHER USES

Using your new Energy Efficiency Kit, there are "old school" practices you can do around your home to make it more efficient. More than likely there are minor to major air leaks lurking around your home—some experts say it could be the equivalent of having a window open in your house 24 hours a day. The good news is that properly caulking and weatherstripping your doors and window frames reduces heating and air conditioning usage. Check your air ducts for small leaks, too.

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