

Doug Rye Says...

TIPS TO CUT YOUR UTILITY BILLS



KEEPING IT SIMPLE

About an hour before Professor Tom Hunt and I went on the air recently to host our weekly radio program, we were discussing our show preparation for 2012. Of course, our goal is to help as many of you as possible. We have been teaching energy efficiency for more than 25 years and realize that as advancements in “building science” are discovered, there is more to teach and reveal.

We share our knowledge with you in monthly print in this magazine, with a weekly radio broadcast, scheduled seminars and individual phone calls and email responses. However, don't forget the extensive resource of energy efficiency information that resides on the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas website: www.SmartEnergyTips.org. Everything Tom and I teach can be found on this website.

Each week, Tom and I receive numerous calls, letters and emails from the radio show listeners and readership of this column. Most are letters of appreciation. However, sometimes we get letters from folks who still have some questions regarding our suggestions. Here is an excerpt of a letter I received from a listener. He said, “I added cellulose insulation in our attic and installed geothermal heating and cooling, and my electric usage went up instead of down. I'm not happy. Please call me.”

There was a time in my distant past that I would have been nervous about returning his call. However, I was anxious to talk to him because I have learned that energy efficiency measures, properly installed, work every time. He was a little surprised that I returned his call so promptly. He made the improvements 11 months ago and had good records of electricity use. I asked him questions for about 10 minutes and didn't yet have the answer. I asked him if his previous system was a heat pump or electric resistance heat. He answered that the previous system was a propane furnace and no central cooling. Here's an “ah ha” moment!

I asked him what his monthly propane bill was in the winter months of 2010 and he said about \$130 per month. I asked him what his propane bill was so far in the winter of 2011. He said he didn't have a propane bill anymore. Then he got excited and almost shouted, “Oh wow, now I understand. My electric bill went up \$35, but my propane bill went down \$130.”

I then suggested that he have a sub meter installed on his geothermal system so that he could know exactly how much electricity the geothermal unit uses each month. He was very appreciative and kept thanking me. This fellow had already solved his problem but just needed a little help to understand it. I think that we now have a fellow who may recommend what he did to improve his house.

Unfortunately, many folks just can't afford to make energy efficiency improvements. It usually hinges on income challenges. As one caller told me, “I am one of those who has to choose between food, medicine and utility bills every month. I cannot afford all three.” But even in this case, I try to help in some way. I am always humbled that they would call me for help.

So, Tom and I decided that we would not assume that folks already know the answer, and we would always try to keep our teaching as simple to understand as possible. In these next few issues, I will continue to teach and help you understand energy efficiency, from the very basic laws of physics to the application of energy efficiency improvements for your house. I can hardly wait and hope that the information will help you.

P.S. If our radio program is not on a station in your area, you can go to www.1037thebuzz.com and hear the show live at 9:06 a.m. on Saturday mornings. Go to www.SmartEnergyTips.org to listen to previous shows and get lots of other great energy information. •

Doug Rye, a licensed architect living in Saline County and the popular host of the “Home Remedies” radio show, works as a consultant for the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas to promote energy efficiency to cooperative members statewide. To order Doug's video or ask energy efficiency-related questions, call Doug at 1-501-653-7931. More energy-efficiency tips, as well as Doug's columns, can also be found at www.SmartEnergyTips.org.