

Energy Consumption In An Empty Home

Have you ever gone away on vacation and expected a smaller energy bill on your return, only to find the bill was pretty much the same as when you're home? For many reasons, your energy consumption may be the same as usual.

Where is the energy going?

Electricity is consumed all the time, whether anyone is home or not. The modern house contains a variety of conveniences that rely on energy, many of which you don't think of as being "on."

For example, many electric baseboard and wall heaters have controls you can turn down, but they are still on part of the time. Without the other heat gains from having people in the house—for example, from body heat, lights, cooking, bathing and opening the curtains to let in the sun's heat—the heating system may be required to come on more often, depending on the weather.

Your fridge works harder than usual in a warm kitchen without ventilation; if you have nearly emptied it, it will work even harder. The hot water tank and pipes have some heat loss, so unless you have turned it off, the tank is still drawing energy to keep the water hot. Waterbed heaters continue to keep the bed warm, even if no one is there. You may have some lighting that comes on each day for security purposes.

Many electronic devices also draw power all the time. Examples are most TVs and anything else with a remote control or an electric clock. All those rechargers and devices with a small black transformer box draw power whenever plugged in. Even ground-fault interrupter (GFI) outlets, used in most bathrooms, for example, draw some power. It all adds up.

You will save a small amount on things you turn on only when you're home, such as the stove and lights. However, any savings may be negated when you do all the extra laundry you may be bringing home from your holidays.

If your meter is read while you are away, any energy savings may be split between two billing periods, making them even more difficult to notice.

What can I do about it?

You could switch off all power at the breaker to save energy while you're away, and come home to a Video recorder that has lost programming, a cold water tank, clocks that must be reset, and spoiled food in the fridge. Or you could spend quite a while unplugging certain things before you go away. For a short absence, it may not be worth the inconvenience, but for a longer period, you may find the extra trouble is justified to turn down, turn off, or unplug some items and reset them afterwards.

Some things likely shouldn't be touched when you go away, so the related energy use is unavoidable—for example, any pumps (such as for a well, swimming pool, or sump pump), a freezer (unless you have emptied it in preparation for a very long absence), an automatic watering system or aquarium.

In winter, keep the heating system on and the thermostat set no lower than 55F (13C) to prevent water pipes from freezing in cold temperatures. Leave the doors below sinks open to expose pipes to the warmer air.

The key is to be aware of the unseen energy users and decide whether to leave them operating as usual or to put them into "vacation mode" and re-set them later. Only you can weigh the inconvenience against the potential energy savings.

You may want to use a pre-departure checklist to speed up the shutting-down routine, as well as the switching-on process on your return. Whether you live in a house or an apartment, you can pick and choose the applicable items from a vacation energy checklist that you feel would be worth doing, depending on the length of your absence.

To avoid worry about a missed bill payment while you're away, why not enroll in [our AutoPay Online process?](#) The AutoPay option makes budgeting easier, year-round. Go to [our secure log-in page](#) to sign up for AutoPay.

For a lengthy absence, you may want to call us at (253) 857-5950 to make arrangements ensuring your account is kept in good standing.