

As record heat wave bears down on Minnesota, save money and energy

Written by Minnesota Department of Commerce
Tuesday, 24 July 2012 21:51

It hasn't been this hot in 100 years. With a record heat wave bearing down on Minnesota, the Minnesota Department of Commerce is offering some simple tips to save money, conserve energy, and stay cool.

The last time it was this hot, most Minnesotans were lucky to have a light bulb in the living room and an ice box in the cellar," said Commerce Commissioner Mike Rothman. "But times have changed as modern homes and businesses rely on electricity to stay cool during the summer. So when the temperature tops 100 degrees, Minnesotans know that staying cool costs money."

The Commerce Department's Division of Energy Resources is committed to helping Minnesotans make informed decisions about their energy use – particularly as AC units across the state are working overtime to keep homes and businesses cool. In that effort, the Minnesota Department of Commerce issued the following money-saving tips for Minnesota consumers today.

1. Switch energy use from high-cost to low-cost periods. Energy costs are usually higher on hot summer days, so try running appliances in the evening when costs are usually lower. Consumers can log on to the Midwest Independent Transmission System Operator (MISO) website to see in real time how high energy prices are in their region at any given time.
2. Use a programmable thermostat or ask your utility if they can automatically adjust your energy use during high cost periods. Install and use a programmable thermostat with your central air conditioner. Or, if you are home throughout the day, manually turn on and off your air conditioner as needed. You can also ask your utility whether they can automatically adjust your energy use during high cost periods. Xcel Energy customers can sign up for the Savers Switch program. More information about that program is available on the Xcel Energy website .
3. Tune-up your air conditioner. Just like your car, your AC unit needs some TLC from time to time to ensure it is operating efficiently. Cottonwood fuzz, grass, leaves, and dust can accumulate on the coils of your air conditioner causing it to work harder and wear out sooner. To learn more about how to keep your AC unit running well, visit the Home Energy Resource MN website .

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4. Keep cool air inside. Keep shades pulled and doors and windows closed during the daytime when temperatures are the warmest.

5. Use fans. Use fans to cool your body or to pull cooler air in through windows at night. The use of ceiling fans and oscillating fans in hot weather will create a windchill effect that can make your home feel cooler and reduce the need for air conditioning.

6. Air dry dishes and clothes. Reduce the electricity use of your dishwasher and clothes dryer by air drying dishes and clothes.

7. Conserve power. Turn off devices when you are not using them (lights, TVs, entertainment systems, computers, and monitors). Plug home electronics (TVs and DVD players) into power strips and turn of the power strips when the equipment is not in use.

8. Get an Advanced Energy Audit and sign up for utility conservation programs. Find out how your house is working. An advanced energy audit will provide an evaluation of your home's energy use, insulation levels, air leakage and mechanical systems. Utility companies and private contractors can provide audits; check with your utility or the Minnesota Building Performance Association at www.mbpa.us .

9. Use CFLs and LED lighting. Replace your old inefficient incandescent lights with compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) or light-emitting diodes (LEDs). Current ENERGY STAR-labeled CFLs, for instance, use about one third of the energy and last up to 10 times longer than an incandescent bulb with the same light output.

10. Stay safe. Visit the Minnesota Department of Health website for tips and resources to make sure you and your family are safe and healthy during this period of severe heat.

11. Check on elderly and vulnerable neighbors. Make sure elderly and vulnerable neighbors have access to a cool spot and ample liquids.

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12. Disconnection during Extreme Heat Conditions. Minnesota consumers should know that a utility may not disconnect your electrical service without the consent of the customer in any county when that county is under an excessive heat watch, heat advisory, or excessive heat warning issued by the National Weather Service . This applies to customers of a public utility, municipal utility, or cooperative electric association. To find out if your county is under one of these weather conditions, visit the NOAA website . If you have any questions about the application of this Hot Weather Rule, please contact the Consumer Affairs Office experts of the Public Utilities Commission at consumer.puc@state.mn.us or (651) 296-0406 or (800) 657-3782.

For more tips on how to save energy and stay cool, visit the U.S. Department of Energy's Energy Savers website , talk to your utility, or contact the Minnesota Department of Commerce Energy Information Center by phone at (651) 296-5175 or by email at energy.info@state.mn.us
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