

How to reduce your electricity bill

If there's one thing you should do this winter to reduce your electricity bill, do not rush out and buy a heater.

In fact, residents could save as much as R300 on their monthly bill if they opt to not use a

People should think before they buy a heater, and not just because the extra energy places a strain on the power grid, but it will reduce their electricity bills.

From May to August, the use in energy spikes, and this has been attributed to the increase in heating and cooking, especially the use of heaters.

An example of a household bill:

"The average power a heater draws is about 2 000W. That figure over one hour is 2kW/h. The cost per kW is about R1.17 including VAT. If you take those two amounts and multiply for an hour, you will be paying about R2.34 just for the use of that heater. However, say for example you use that heater for just four hours a day for 30 days. You will end up with an additional figure of around R280 added to your bill".

With the electricity tariff expected to go up by 5.5 percent from July 1, residents could see their bill increase by about R300 simply due to the use of the heater.

"Peak demand is between 5pm and 9pm, and this is where we should all try to be more energy-wise,"

Tips from the Energy Office:

- * Lower the thermostat on your geyser to 60°C and cover it with a geyser blanket and insulate the water pipes. The most energy-hungry appliance, the geyser is responsible for up to 39 percent of monthly electricity bills. Consider replacing your geyser with an energy-efficient alternative.
- * Install a timer that switches the geyser on and off according to the times you specify, which prevents heating water when not necessary.
- * It is not true that regularly switching a geyser on and off damages the thermostat, nor that more electricity is used if a geyser is switched on and off.
- * When washing up, fill the sink with warm soapy water instead of letting the hot water run while washing items individually.
- * It is not true that you should leave fluorescent lights on rather than turning them off. Fluorescent lights require little electricity to start up, and although it does decrease the tube's life if you turn the lights off and on, the value of the saved electricity is greater than the cost of replacing the tube.
- * Use CFL bulbs, solar lamps, motion detector lights or photocell/day-night lights for exterior lighting.

- * Many appliances continue to draw a small amount of power even when they are switched off. These “phantom” loads occur in most appliances that use electricity. You can avoid this by unplugging the appliance at the wall.
- * Switch off your computer if you’re not going to use it for the next two hours.
- * Replace ageing appliances with new ones after 10-15 years. Replacing it with a modern, energy-efficient one will pay off as much as 60 percent in energy savings.
- * Defrost food in the fridge instead of defrosting in a microwave oven.
- * Instead of leaving appliances such as a TV or DVD player on stand-by mode, rather switch off at the mains.
- * A microwave oven is cheaper to operate than a stove.
- * Soak beans, lentils and the like in cold water overnight. This will save several hours of cooking.
- * If you are about to buy or replace an oven, consider buying a convection oven, which uses less energy than a conventional oven and reduces cooking times substantially.
- * Store any surplus hot water from the kettle in a vacuum flask and use later for a cup of tea or for washing up.
- * Seal up cracks or holes in the home (caulking). Reduce air leakage on doors and windows by using weather strips to keep out cold air.
- * Cover bare floors with rugs.
- * Wear warm clothing and use an extra blanket on the bed.
- * It is cheaper to use an electric blanket in bed instead of a heater.
- * Install ceiling insulation fibre to keep your house warm.

Adapted from "IOL News" by ARTHI SANPATH, May 2013, How to reduce your electricity bill.