

How To Save On Cooling Costs This Season

(StatePoint) As the mercury rises, so do your home cooling bills.

A typical American household spends almost 20 percent of its utility bill on cooling costs, according to Energy Star. When the air cooling your home escapes due to leaks, gaps and poor insulation, air conditioners must work harder to compensate.

Fortunately, there are ways to keep hot air out and cool air in.

Insulate Properly

One big step towards lowering energy bills is to properly insulate your home. You may want a professional energy audit to determine what areas of your home are in greatest need of insulation.

Growing in popularity among homeowners is spray polyurethane foam (SPF), known as one of the most effective insulators available according to the American Chemistry Council's Center for the Polyurethanes Industry (CPI). SPF insulation is spray-applied foam that expands to insulate mid- to larger-size areas of your home, such as walls, attics and roofs. This insulation improves your home's energy efficiency, and helps keep rooms at the desired temperature. Additionally, interior moisture levels can be better controlled, helping inhibit mold and mildew growth.

While you can do small air-sealing jobs yourself, insulating your home often requires professional expertise. When looking for a contractor, review qualifications and experience. Ask if your contractor has installed SPF insulation previously and is trained on installation, safe application and ventilation methods. You may have to leave your home while the SPF insulation is being installed, so discuss this with your contractor before installation. Visit CPI's spraypolyurethane.com for more information.

Seal Cracks

Cold air can leak out around windows, doors, light fixtures, electrical and gas outlets, cracks, rim joists, air conditioner penetrations and gaps in corners. To air seal these small areas, a popular choice among Do-It-Yourselfers is insulating foam sealant in an aerosol can, which is sold at many hardware and home improvement stores.

When applying foam sealant, follow the safety information on the label. It can be difficult to remove from clothing and most surfaces, so practice by applying a small amount on scrap material. Make sure you have



any protective gear noted in the manufacturer's instructions, like safety goggles or glasses. Gloves and full-coverage clothing help avoid getting product on skin, minimizing potential exposure to chemical ingredients. Follow product instructions on ventilation, and any instructions about keeping children and pets away from the project area until the foam has hardened.

Tune Up Cooling Systems

Inspect your cooling system yearly. Do this if you use a central air system or separate air conditioner units. Clean or replace filters regularly to help units operate better.

Make sure you have the right air conditioning unit for your home. Poorly-sized units can increase energy costs and reduce comfort.

Coordinate everything with a programmable thermostat to control air conditioning levels to match your daily living patterns. If you need to replace cooling units, consider ones that have the Energy Star rating, which meet strict energy efficiency guidelines set by the Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Energy.

Shade Your Home

For centuries, people have used trees, shading and drapes to keep the sun at bay. Trees and shrubs on your home's western and southern exposures keep it cooler. So can trellises or awnings. And closing blinds or shades can also keep rooms comfortable.

Increase Savings

Making your home more energy efficient is not only positive for the environment, it can save you money. You may be eligible for rebates from your utility company and government tax credits.