



# Using less **energy** this winter won't leave you **cold**.

This winter, you can save money by using less energy— without sacrificing that nice warm feeling generated by your home's heating system. You can do it yourself with a three-step plan. Or you can ask your local Air Conditioning Contractors of America (ACCA) contractor to handle the technical work for you.

## 1. Manage the Thermostat

When you come home from work, don't give into the temptation to move the thermostat to a very high setting to heat the house faster. That doesn't work. Heating systems are designed to pump out a set volume of warm air per minute. All that happens when you spin the thermostat up an extra 10 degrees is that the system runs longer, overshoots your temperature mark and wastes energy. Instead, select the lowest possible temperature that will keep you and your family comfortable and set the thermostat there. Remember, energy use goes down 3 percent to 4 percent for every degree you lower the temperature below your normal set point. Before going to bed at night, set the thermostat down a few degrees. When you get up, put it back to the regular setting — or leave it alone until everyone returns from work and school in the evening. A better way to manage the temperature is to install a programmable thermostat. Set it to turn the temperature down a few degrees at night and when no one is home.

Then forget about it.

## 2. Yeah, Yeah, Change the Filter

At the risk of telling you something you're tired of hearing, replace the air filter in your furnace. Dirty air filters reduce the amount of air flowing through a system and make the furnace work harder to maintain the temperature. So change the filter every month. Enough said about filters. If you have a heat pump, clean the outside condensing coil. Dirt, leaves, grass and other debris can block airflows and reduce efficiency. Clean up around the unit, removing all obstructions within a distance of a foot or so. As a safety measure, homeowners with fossil fuel burning systems should consider installing carbon monoxide (CO) monitors to insure the safe quality of the indoor air.

## 3. Rate Your System

Home heating and cooling systems typically last for 15 years. When a unit begins to show its age, you have two choices. You can overhaul the system or replace it. Because heating and cooling technologies improve over time, a new system designed with newer, more energy-efficient equipment makes sense, especially if your system is 10 or more years old. If your system has reached a critical age, ask an ACCA contractor for advice. He or she can estimate the cost of a new system as well as a payback schedule that will show you how newer technology will pay you back in lower energy usage.

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#### **4. The One-Step Method: Professional Preventive Maintenance**

If you aren't comfortable dealing with heating, ventilating and air conditioning equipment, an ACCA contractor can look after your system better than you can. In any event, a qualified professional should go over your system once or twice a year. A professional can change the filter, clean up and inspect the system to ensure that all the components are working properly. Here's what an inspection entails:

- Ensuring that supply and return ducts are tightly connected, insulated and sealed to prevent the loss of air, heat, and dollars
  - Cleaning and servicing humidifiers to keep them operating efficiently
  - Inspecting heat exchangers for defects and cracks
  - Verifying that controls and safeties are working properly
  - Evaluating vents and chimneys to make sure that all toxic combustion products flow to the outside
  - Ascertaining that the proper amount of combustion air is being fed into furnaces and boilers.
- Maintaining the heat pump by testing the airflow and charging the refrigerant as necessary. Studies show that a 10 percent loss of refrigerant raises energy use (and costs) by 20 percent.

You can ask your ACCA contractor to handle these chores under a preventive maintenance agreement or PMA. PMAs typically cover one or two full-service maintenance visits per year, provide discounts for parts and service work, and ensure that you receive priority service should a system failure occur during the cold of the winter or the heat of the summer. Whether you look after your system yourself or with a PMA, a well maintained heating system will use less energy to heat your home this winter.