

# Getting the Most From Your Electric Heat



 Seattle City Light

*Myths and Facts  
About Heating Your  
Home With Electricity*

[www.seattle.gov/light/conserve](http://www.seattle.gov/light/conserve)

# Be Smart About Electric Heat



- The simplest way to save a great deal of energy and money is to keep control of your thermostat. Set your thermostat no higher than 68° when home, and as low as possible or off when you are away or sleeping.\*
- Use an accurate thermometer next to your thermostat to verify the correct temperature.
- Replace old thermostats with more accurate models that use vapor diaphragm or elec-tronic technology to give precise temperature control.
- Install a programmable or automatic setback thermostat if you tend to forget to turn the temperature down at night and when you are away, or if you want to have the heater come on just before you wake up or arrive home.

- Use portable heaters when you are spending most of your time in only one or two rooms. Use your furnace when you need to heat your entire house.\*

\* If you have a heat pump, follow manufacturer recommendations for temperature setback and keep all heating ducts open and functional.

**MYTH:** *It takes more energy to heat a cold house than keeping the temperature constant.*

**FACT:** With current heating equipment and building practices, a home in Seattle will rarely get colder than 55° overnight, even in the dead of winter. Using a correctly sized heater, a room takes only about 20 minutes to heat from 55° to 68°. Compare this to having the heat on all night, and the savings are substantial.



# Maintain Your Comfort



- **If your family tends to gather in one room in the evening, make this your “warm room”. Close it off to hallways, connecting rooms or stairways by shutting doors or putting up blankets or heavy curtains. This living space will heat up faster than your whole house, and use less energy to stay heated.**
- **Don't forget to reduce your own personal heat loss by wearing warm, comfortable, layered clothing.**

**MYTH: Portable space heaters are dangerous and use too much energy!**

**FACT:** If you turn down your central heating system and instead heat your “warm room” with a portable electric space heater, you will use less energy. A 1,500 watt space heater uses only 11 cents per hour compared with a 20,000 watt electric furnace that uses \$1.40 an hour. Space heaters become expensive when you use several at once in large, open areas and/or forget to turn them off.

For safe use, always turn a space heater off when you leave the room, and keep objects at least 24 inches away. The safest types to use around children are the electric radiator types without glowing wires. NEVER use a gas or propane heater indoors! You can become asphyxiated and die!

**MYTH: There is no way I can be comfortable at 68 degrees!**

**FACT:** If you are used to a 72° or 74° home, you would certainly feel cold if you suddenly changed the temperature to 68°.

Our bodies do adjust to temperature changes, but it takes time. Try turning your thermostat down just one or two degrees for a few days, then a degree or two more. And make sure you are not sitting in a draft.

**MYTH: Conservation means freezing in a cold house.**

**FACT:** Conservation means using energy wisely. We want you to be comfortable in your home. If you're wearing a t-shirt and you're still cold, you will save money and use less energy by putting on warmer clothes instead of raising the temperature. If you are used to a warm home, your body will adjust if you turn your thermostat down a degree or two.

**MYTH: It's bad for your health to sleep in a cool house.**

**FACT:** There are no proven health benefits for sleeping in a warm or cool bedroom. If by adding a blanket or socks, you can comfortably turn your heat lower at night, you will save money.



# Maximize the Efficiency of Your Heating System

- **Replace furnace filters each month.**
- **Seal seams of heating ducts in all unheated spaces. (Do not use duct tape. It quickly becomes brittle and ineffective. Use mastic tape instead.)**
- **Vacuum and dust baseboard heaters and wall fan units.**
- **Keep all furniture, curtains and other materials at least 18" away from heaters and registers.**
- **Install heat-circulating ceiling fans in rooms with high ceilings.**
- **Use portable fans to circulate baseboard heat.**

**MYTH:** *Baseboard heating is extremely inefficient.*

**FACT:** Electric baseboard heating is 100% efficient. In other words, all the heat produced goes into



the space to be heated. There are no losses from a furnace through ducts. The problem with baseboard heat is that it has no fan for distributing the heat evenly throughout a room. Most of the heat rises to the ceiling and stays there. That's why a ceiling fan is so helpful. It moves the heat down to where you can feel it. If a ceiling fan is not practical, use a regular room fan on low to circulate heat evenly. Another advantage of baseboard heat is you only need to heat the room you are in.

**MYTH:** *Using fans to circulate heat will make me cold.*

**FACT:** A slowly moving ceiling fan is very effective at circulating baseboard heat without causing cold drafts. As long as a room fan is on low and not blowing directly on you, you should not feel a draft. Aim a room fan away from you and at a 90° angle to the baseboard heater for effective circulation.

# Make Your Home a Heat Haven



- **Plug leaks around doors, windows, fireplace dampers, attic hatches and wall penetrations to keep heat in and cold air out.**
- **Add insulation to walls, floors, attics and windows.**

**Myth:** *I can save money by using my fireplace to supplement my furnace or baseboard heaters.*

**Fact:** Using your fireplace to heat your home is extremely inefficient! When you burn in an open fireplace, 90% of the heat goes up the chimney. And the draft created by the chimney will suck all the heat out of an averaged size home in about 20 minutes. If you must burn in your fireplace, use glass doors to control the draft and turn your heat down or off. And REMEMBER to close the damper when the fire is out. Leaving the damper open is the same as leaving your front door wide open.

**MYTH:** *If I seal up all the leaks, my house will be too tight.*

**FACT:** In most homes built before 1976, it is difficult to seal up every leak to the point where indoor air quality becomes a problem. Sealing up

the obvious leaks (around doors, windows, plumbing and electrical penetrations, and your fireplace damper) gives you better control over how much cold air comes into your home. Moisture control is also critical for maintaining healthy indoor air. So make sure kitchen and bath exhaust fans vent to the outside and are used while cooking and bathing. (For homes built after 1976, higher energy efficiency standards were required so homes were built tighter.)

**MYTH:** *New windows don't work! I have brand new, double-pane windows in my apartment. But I still feel drafts!*

**FACT:** Drafts do not mean the window is leaky or poorly installed. Even the most efficient window is much less efficient than an insulated wall. When the warm air in your apartment hits the cold glass, it cools and falls. Unprotected windows create a mini convection current that feels like cold, moving air. Installing heavy curtains in front of your largest windows will reduce those convection currents, keep you more comfortable and save you money.





**MYTH:** *There is nothing I can do about my leaky single-pane windows because replacements are too expensive.*

**FACT:** Inexpensive plastic storm window kits, if installed correctly, can be just as effective as double-pane windows.

As long as a sealed air space is created between the window and the plastic, you will realize similar energy savings. The one disadvantage is that they last only one season. Storm windows made by stretching and stapling 3-6 mill clear plastic around 1" x 2" wood frames and then weather-stripped in place will last several seasons if stored properly.

**MYTH:** *Installing new, energy-efficient windows is the most cost-effective weatherization measure for my home.*

**FACT:** Even though new, efficient double-pane windows save energy, they are very expensive. It takes much longer to recoup your investment through energy bill savings than with a lower-cost measure like insulation. We recommend doing low- or no-cost measures first (turn down your thermostat; plug gaps, etc.). Then insulate; then install windows.

For more information on how to conserve energy, call our Conservation Help Line at **(206) 684-3800** or visit: [www.seattle.gov/light/conserve](http://www.seattle.gov/light/conserve)





# CITY LIGHT

## Seattle City Light's Conservation Publications:

- Air Quality in the Home
- Compact Fluorescent Lighting
- Do-It-Yourself Home Energy Audit
- Energy Conservation Services
- Energy Saving Tips for Small Business Customers
- Getting the Most from Your Electric Heat
- Guide to Efficient Home Lighting
- Purchasing a Heat Pump
- Resource Conservation Services for MF Owners
- Saving Electricity at Home for Owners
- Saving Electricity at Home for Renters
- Why Are My Bills So High?
- Your Electric Appliances

These publications and more conservation information can be found on our web site:

[seattle.gov/light/conserve/resident](http://seattle.gov/light/conserve/resident)



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