



## How to Save Money on Energy Bills When You're Away from Home



Whether you're heading off for vacation this fall or thinking ahead to holiday travels, it always pays to take stock of how you are leaving things at home, especially when it comes to energy bills. It may feel daunting to add yet one more task before you leave town, but homes can consume around 82% of their normal energy even when unoccupied, so take heed of these seven easy, energy saving steps from Kiplinger before your next trip.

### **1. Program your thermostat**

Setting your thermostat at a higher or lower temperature when you leave can save you money on your utility bill. If you have a programmable or smart thermostat, set it to 'vacation' mode.

Adjusting your manual unit a few degrees up or down can also have a significant impact. In fact, according to Duke Energy, a change of just three degrees for 24 hours a day can save 30% on your energy costs. Or, if you're not leaving for an extended time and the forecast calls for mild weather, consider turning the system off.

## **2. Unplug appliances and electronics**

When electrical appliances, "energy vampires," are plugged into an outlet, they use energy even when turned off, which can account for up to 10% of your energy bill. To save money, unplug all large and small electrical appliances, such as your computer, cable box, coffee maker, microwave, printer, television and toaster.

## **3. Turn off or turn down the water heater**

"Water heating accounts for up to 25% of the energy a home consumes, and you won't even be there to use it," says Mark Feygin, founder and CEO of PowerSetter. "Switch off the water heater at the breaker while your home is vacant ... but remember to leave yourself a note to turn it back on again when you return." Turning off your water heater also prevents any unexpected malfunctions while away, like a water leak and flooding.

Many water heaters also have a vacation setting, usually found on the temperature dial. Adjusting it to 50 degrees Fahrenheit or the lowest setting available can help you save money while away.

## **4. Put lights on timers**

Although simply turning off the lights saves you money while on vacation, many people choose to keep the lights on for security reasons. Instead of leaving the lamps lit all day and night, install timers and take the worry out of how much energy you're using. Keep in mind that while incandescent bulbs can get hot and overheat, LED lights save more energy and can be left on for extended periods of time without overheating, according to energy.gov.

## **5. Keep window coverings half-way or all the way closed**

Your house will stay cool, and you'll save energy by keeping window shades and blinds closed when the temperature climbs.

## **6. Keep your refrigerator half-full**

A fully stocked refrigerator stays colder than an empty one. Although you may want to remove all the food from your fridge when leaving town, keeping your refrigerator and freezer at least half full is actually more energy efficient. But if you just can't fathom the thought of coming home to sour milk, fill your fridge and freezer with full water bottles or ice trays, and adjust the thermostats on your refrigerator and freezer to a higher setting — 38 degrees F for the refrigerator and 5 degrees F for the freezer. If you leave for more than four weeks, you will probably want to empty and unplug your fridge.

## **7. More ways to save while away**

Before you walk out the door, add these other "to dos" to your list and save even more on your energy bill.

- Turn off both ceiling and personal fans.

- Drain and winterize your hot tub or unplug the hot tub heater.
- Turn off or lower the temperature on the heater for your swimming pool but leave the pool pump on.
- Unplug your window air conditioner.
- Unplug any landscaping water features if not absolutely needed, or set them to come on less often or for a shorter period of time.

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