

Save Energy With an Electric Blanket



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A combination of turning down your furnace thermostat at night and using an electric blanket can help lower your energy bills.

Setting back the furnace thermostat at night can cut your utility bills significantly during the winter. Depending upon your climate, you can reduce your heating bills by 1 percent to 2 percent for each

degree you lower the thermostat setting at night.

It is a common misconception that it takes more energy to reheat the house in the morning than you save from lowering the thermostat overnight. The only caveat is, if you have a heat pump and the backup resistance heaters in the electric furnace come on in the morning to quickly reheat the house. There are several ways to control this with a manual thermostat or just install a special setback thermostat for heat pumps with backup resistance heating.

Everyone likes to be comfortably warm, especially as one relaxes before bedtime. If you can manage and properly control the temperature drop, your bedroom can be comfortable for sleeping at a lower room temperature. For people with sinus problems, sleeping in cooler room air is less drying to their sinuses.

The best method to have a comfortable temperature setback at night is to install a programmable clock thermostat. Program it so it does not start to lower the temperature until just after you are in bed and then raises it just before you awake in the morning. If you manually set a standard thermostat lower at bedtime, the entire house will be very cold when your family awakes in the morning. The earlier you can set the thermostat lower, the more you will save so experiment with earlier times as your family adjusts to the temperature changes.

Using an electric blanket or mattress pad is an excellent method to stay comfortable all night long. My computerized thermostat always lowers the temperature at night and I have used an electric blanket for years. Recently though, I have switched to a dual control (one for each side) electric mattress pad. I prefer feeling the warmth from beneath my body and less weight on top of me.

My queen-size mattress pad uses only 220 watts and it cycles on and off to maintain a steady temperature. The aver-

age electricity usage is less than 100 watts, about as much as a standard light bulb uses. When you compare this to cutting your heating bills by up to 10 percent, the overall electricity savings are significant.

The key differences among various brands and models of electric blankets and mattress pads are the controls and the heating wires. The best, but more expensive, models use digital ambient temperature controls. This circuitry senses as the room cools throughout the night and automatically increases the heat output to compensate for steady comfort. Better blankets also use longer-lasting fabrics.

Better controls have a preheat setting and also provide nearly silent operation. Cheaper electric controls make a quiet click when the internal thermostat switches them on and off throughout the night. If you cannot fall asleep easily, the clicking can become quite annoying.

Select a blanket or mattress pad with PTC (positive thermal coefficient) heating wire. Its resistance changes as the temperature changes. Where the blanket or pad is resting tightly over or under your body, and therefore warmer, its heating output decreases. This maintains a more constant sleeping temperature near your body.

Other tips to stay comfortable in a cooler bedroom are to increase the thermal mass in the bedroom with ceramic planters or other masonry items. When the thermostat is set back at night and the room air temperature starts to drop, the thermal mass transfers its heat content to the room. This will slow down the air temperature drop in the room. This is helpful if it takes time for someone to fall asleep.

If you have a ceiling fan or other penetrations in the bedroom ceiling, seal them well to minimize the loss of heated room air. Install an electric radiant heating panel on the wall or ceiling. These panels produce sensible heat quickly in the morning if you feel chilly when you first get up.

To get the children on board, consider using one of the new Story Blankets. These blankets have a two-minute battery-operated LED light and sound track built into them. There also is a sleep mode with a gradually fading light display at the end of the story.

The following companies offer electric blankets/mattress pads: Perfect Fit, (800) 299-1378, www.perfectfitindustries.com; Sunbeam, (800) 892-7684, www.sunbeam.com; West Point Home, (800) 533-8229, www.martex.com; and Story Blankets: Lulla Beds, (407) 423-0148, www.lullabeds.com.

Send inquiries to James Dulley, Cooperative Connections, 6906 Royalgreen Dr., Cincinnati, OH 45244



Beef Bucks Group Serves at Vikes Event

Beef producers with South Dakota Beef Bucks were on hand to showcase the state's beef industry at a Minnesota Vikings family picnic.

The group prepared all-beef brats and all-beef super hotdogs for members of the Vikings organization and their families at a Sept. 1 event in Eden Prairie, Minn. A children's promotional book on beef production was also a giveaway at the event.

South Dakota Beef Bucks is a nonprofit organization run by a volunteer board. Money raised through sales of the organization's cookbooks, Beef Bucks and golf tournament are used for scholarships and educational programs like Ag in the Classroom and beef industry events.

The board includes Chairman JoAnne Hillman and Jim Woster, Sioux Falls; Ray Knotz, Colman; Bob and Nancy Montross, DeSmet; John Steifvater, Salem; Eileen Moller, Mount Vernon; and Delina Nagel, Avon.

For more on Beef Bucks, contact 1-888-640-MEAT.

Working Together

Electric Co-op Groups Join GOTRAC

Two electric cooperative organizations in South Dakota have joined an alliance of consumer groups that support the proposed expansion of the Dakota Minnesota and Eastern Railroad (DM&E).

East River Electric Power Cooperative, a regional power supplier, and the South Dakota Rural Electric Association, based in Pierre, S.D., recently joined the Growth Opportunity Through Rail Access Coalition (GOTRAC). GOTRAC represents the interests of local governments, agriculture and other groups that support efforts to grow the economy,



increase rail capacity and develop communities through safer and more efficient rail transportation in the Midwest. The coalition backs the proposed Federal Railroad Administration's loan to upgrade the DM&E tracks into the coal-rich Powder River Basin.

East River Electric, which delivers

wholesale power to 20 rural electric cooperatives and one municipal electric system in eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota, is experiencing rising costs because of the lack of rail competition for coal delivery.

"As a wholesale power supplier, East River Electric and its members know full well the impact of the lack of rail competition in hauling of Powder River Basin coal for cooperative power plants," said General Manager Jeff Nelson. "During the past two years, we have seen a doubling of our coal-shipping rates because of the monopoly rail situation. Also, we have experienced a significant decline in coal deliveries, leading to grave concerns regarding the reliability of our power plants due to a shortage of coal."

Basin Electric Power Cooperative, Bismarck, N.D., generates power for East River and electric cooperatives in nine states. Basin Electric is currently considering the construction of additional coal-based power plants in the region, including possible locations in South Dakota.

"The issue of rail delivery, at a fair and competitive price with a high degree of reliability, is one of the major issues being considered in determining the site for a new plant," Nelson added. "A new base-load power plant would be a large boost to the state's economy and provide needed electricity to serve our growing loads."

SDREA represents the legislative interests of 28 rural electric distribution cooperatives and three generation and transmission cooperatives in South Dakota, serving nearly 300,000 people across 90 percent of the state's landmass.

"Excessive coal-shipping rates are raising costs for electric cooperatives, which could lead to rate increases for member-consumers," said SDREA Executive Manager Audry Ricketts. "We believe that the DM&E is vital to this region and the country to invigorate competition in the railroad industry. Therefore, electric cooperatives in the region strongly endorse this project and strongly encourage the Federal Railroad Administration to grant the \$2.3 billion loan to the DM&E."