

**THINGS YOU CAN DO FOR FREE (OR ALMOST FREE)  
TO CUT YOUR USE OF GASOLINE, DIESEL FUEL, HEATING OIL,  
PROPANE AND ELECTRICITY**

**By Pamela W. Person**

**Some money-saving, NO cost or very low cost ways to cut your use of gasoline and diesel fuel:**

1. Combine your trips. Make a list of your errands and appointments in the same direction and do them all in the same trip. If you do multiple errands in one trip you not only save fuel but the time it takes to get there and back!
2. When going to an event, see if you can carpool with a neighbor or friend.
3. Find out the proper number of pounds for your tires and make sure they are inflated to that pressure. Check once every month. Under-inflated tires (very common in cold weather) can cause you to lose 1-2 miles per gallon, as it's like driving with your parking brake on. Incorrect inflation can also cause you to have to replace your tires sooner. (Under-inflated tires can lower gas mileage by 0.4 percent for every pound per square inch drop in pressure of all four tires. [www.fueleconomy.gov](http://www.fueleconomy.gov))
4. Don't be an aggressive driver. The faster you drive (over 60 miles per hour) or the more jackrabbit starts you make, the more gasoline you waste – anywhere from 5 percent around town to 33 percent at highway speeds. ([www.fueleconomy.gov](http://www.fueleconomy.gov))
5. Observe the speed limit - each mile driven over 60 miles per hour is like paying 20 cents more per gallon. ([www.fueleconomy.gov](http://www.fueleconomy.gov))
6. Avoid unnecessary idling. Particularly when the weather is cold, let the car idle while warming up for 30 seconds and then drive it slowly (35 mph) until engine is totally warmed up. Newer engines do not need longer “warm-ups.”
7. Turn your car off even when you're “just running into the store or post office,” as many times you run into a friend and chat for ten minutes. Idling guzzles gas and produces unnecessary pollution! It does not take more gas to restart the engine than it would save from turning off the engine. ([www.fueleconomy.gov](http://www.fueleconomy.gov))
8. Have your air filter inspected every time you change your oil. If it is dirty, replace it, as a dirty air filter can cause you to lose 10 percent of your gas mileage ([www.fueleconomy.gov](http://www.fueleconomy.gov))
9. Have your gas cap inspected. If it is damaged, loose or missing, replace it and avoid having your gas vaporize. Gas vapors cause ozone (smog) formation. Gas caps need to be airtight to avoid loss of fuel.
10. Have your spark plugs inspected and replaced if dirty. If spark plugs are misfiring, that costs mileage.
11. Keep your engine tuned. Fixing a vehicle that is noticeably out of tune can improve gas mileage by 4 percent. Fixing a serious problem such as a faulty oxygen sensor can improve gas mileage by as much as 40 percent. ([www.fueleconomy.gov](http://www.fueleconomy.gov))

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12. Reduce excess weight in vehicles. For every extra 100 pounds you can remove from your vehicle you can increase gas mileage by 20 percent (even more if it's a small car.)

### **SOME money-saving, NO cost or very low cost ways to save on your heating bill:**

1. During the heating season, turn down the thermostat to 58-60 degrees if you are going to be away either for more than 7 hours or overnight. Only have thermostat at 68 degrees when you are at home. Wear an extra layer. If you are elderly or have babies or young children, you need to keep your home warmer when it is occupied.
2. On cold, windy, gray days and nights keep your curtains, shades or blinds closed as windows are a heat loss area.
3. In the colder regions of the country, in the autumn, put your leaves or pine needles in bags and place them next to your foundation for "banking" (reduces heat loss through the foundation).
4. In the colder regions of the country, in the spring, plant evergreen shrubs that retain their needles in the winter near your house foundation to provide a windbreak. Maybe you can find the shrubs in your own woods.
5. Change your furnace and heat pump filters every other month during the heating season. ([www.aceee.org](http://www.aceee.org), Home Energy Checklist for Action)
6. Have your furnace inspected and cleaned yearly if heated by oil and every other year if heated by gas or propane ([www.aceee.org](http://www.aceee.org)). This will postpone replacing your furnace and will save an estimated 10 to 15 percent of your fuel costs.
7. Check your doors to see if there are drafts coming in the sides. If so, put some weather stripping on the sides until you cannot see light or feel a draft.
8. If you do not have modern double-paned windows, add a layer of plastic for the winter as a way to reduce heat loss and rope-caulk very leaky windows.
9. Add storm doors to outside doors to lower the "leaking heat." See if your outside doors are insulated.
10. Make sure you have door sweeps on the bottom of your doors to reduce "leaking heat."
11. Make sure your woodstove or fireplace draft controls are closed when your woodstove or fireplace is not operating.
12. If you use your woodstove often, please clean your woodstove chimney at least once a year to prevent creosote buildup. This is a safety issue.
13. Use ceiling fans to bring the heat (which rises) back down to the floor level.
14. Fill the "box ends" with insulation to reduce "leaking heat." The "box ends" are the open spaces between the wooden floor joists just above the basement wall and under the first floor.
15. Seal as many "air leaks" in your home as possible. In addition to windows, doors and box ends, the worst culprits are usually utility cut-throughs for pipes, gaps around chimneys, recessed lights in insulated ceilings and unfinished spaces behind cupboards and closets.

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([www.aceee.org](http://www.aceee.org)) Light a long incense stick and see where the smoke trails off toward a leak.

### **SOME money- saving, NO cost or low cost ways to reduce your electric bill:**

1. Turn off your lights when you leave a room.
2. If there are “instant on” electronics in your home (TVs, VCRs, DVDs, computers, radios) in your home, plug them into a power strip so you can turn them off completely when you are not using them. “Instant on” costs consumers 7 percent annually.
3. Turn off your computer when you will not be using it for more than four hours or overnight.
4. Dry your clothes on a line in warm weather and indoors when it is cold or inclement.
5. Turn your hot water heater down to 120 degrees (no lower). If your water heater was made before 2000, wrap it in water heater wrap to conserve heat. Any newer water heater has enough insulation; you will void the warranty if you wrap it.
6. When a light bulb burns out, replace it with a compact fluorescent (CFL) one. The new CFLs are brighter and smaller, fit more fixtures, and contain less mercury. Replacing five of your most used incandescent light bulbs with CFLs will save you nearly \$50 annually. They use 75 percent less energy and last up to ten times longer. (<http://www.lipower.org/efficiency/tips/html>)
7. Turn down the heat at night and when not at home so the furnace’s electric motor will not run as much.
8. If you have an air conditioner, try to have it run as little as possible so your bill will be lower.
9. During hot spells, try using fans instead of, or in addition to, an air conditioner. Wear cool clothes and drink plenty of water.
10. When using your air conditioner, set it to over 82 degrees if you are going to be away for more than 7 hours. When you are at home, have the air conditioner set to cool no lower than necessary. Wear cool clothes. If you are elderly or have babies or young children, then you need to keep your home cooler when it is occupied during very hot spells.
11. Most nights in most areas, turn off the air conditioner and open the windows for cool, fresh air.
12. Change your air conditioner’s filter yearly.
13. On hot and humid days, keep your curtains, shades or blinds closed, as windows are a heat gain area.
14. Wash your clothes only when you have a full load. Ninety percent of the energy used for washing clothes is for heating the water. So, wash in warm or cold water and use the energy savings features (<http://www.lipower.org/efficiency/tips/html>)

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15. Wash your dishes in the dishwasher only when you have a full load as 60 to 80 percent of the power used by the dishwasher is for heating the water. (<http://www.lipower.org/efficiency/tips/html>) If you have a small family, rinse dirty dishes in cold water before putting into the dishwasher so they can accumulate over several meals. Use the “air dry” feature.
16. Make more than one meal at a time, e.g., soups, stews, casseroles, spaghetti sauce. Freeze the other portions in separate containers for future meals. This saves time and effort as well as adds variety to your menus.
17. Dry your hair in the air rather than with a dryer.

**These 44 things not only save you money, but also reduce smog, greenhouse gas emissions and air toxics...and some even save you time.**

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This paper was originally written as an op-ed in the *Bangor Daily News* (ME) as a way to help rural Maine citizens reduce their energy costs. It was then reprinted in the League of Women Voters of Maine newsletter. It is also being used by the Bucksport Bay Healthy Communities Environment and Energy Committee (ME) as a public education piece and is on the American Lung Association of Maine Web site. The LWVUS Climate Change Task Force hopes that local Leagues can use this paper for public education.