

## Saving on Vacation

Submitted by Alexis Baker, Environmental Programs Coordinator

The summer vacation season is soon upon us when students are out of school and it is time to head to the beach or to other new and exciting places. However, although we are not there, our house is still using up energy. Here are a few steps to cut down on your electricity bill while you are away.

Unless you are recording your favorite show while you are away, take a few minutes to unplug your electronics. When you walk into your house at night, you may notice digital displays, clocks, and standby LED lights. Remember to unplug these appliances which include such electronics as computers, DVD players, televisions, gaming consoles and microwaves. Also unplug small appliances such as cordless phones, battery chargers, blenders, coffeemakers, toasters, and any other items plugged in. Such appliances that use electricity create a phantom load. Consider putting most of your electronics on a power strip. That way it is easy to shut them off.

Turn off the air conditioner or set your thermostat to a high temperature. It is possible to save \$15 for every two weeks you are away. Pull your blinds and shades to keep the rooms cooler while you are gone. If you dislike coming home to a hot house, buy a programmable thermostat and set in to re-cool your house before you arrive home.

If you have a gas stove or pilot light, shut them off and you may save \$1 to \$2 a month. However, be careful when you relight them. If you plan on being away for a long time, give away all perishable foods in your refrigerator to a friend or neighbor, and turn the temperature down to the lowest setting. It is possible to turn the temperature down to 38°F in your refrigerator without spoilage. However, leave the freezer around -5°F to keep vegetables frozen.

While some people choose to leave the porch light on while they are gone, consider using a solar powered motion sensor. These are relatively inexpensive. Additionally, you may choose to install a timer to turn your indoor light on for a few hours each day to make it look like someone is home. Even better, ask your neighbor to keep an eye out for you.

Unless you have a tankless water heater, you may also consider turning the electric water heater down as low as possible to reduce standby heat loss while you are on vacation or turn it off at the breaker switch. For gas water heaters, switch your unit to pilot.

While you are having a great time away from home, don't forget to continue practicing other eco-conscious behavior. Remember to continue recycling and think about where you drop litter. Even small scraps tossed into the environment can cause problems. Cigarette butts, for instance, cause fires, leave toxic residue in the environment, and ruin picturesque settings. The filters are actually made of cellulose acetate and not cotton,

taking decades to degrade. Don't forget to always practice good habits and teach them to your children while at home or away.

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