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## Combat this summer's high energy bills

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**By Jon Yates** | Summer is just around the corner, meaning it's almost time to crank up your air conditioner.

If you're like me, the mere thought of rising energy bills induces a bad case of the chills.

But fear not, there are ways to reduce your electricity -- and drive down your costs. The Problem Solver spoke to energy experts, who came up with simple ways to save you hundreds of dollars a year in energy costs.

Sound too good to be true? Read on.

One of the biggest energy drains in your house are devices and appliances that consume electricity, even when they're not in use.

Your television, computer, DVR, appliances -- everything -- literally sucks electricity twenty-four hours a day. Know account for more than 10 percent of a device's energy consumption, said David Kolata, executive director of the no

Unlike Dracula, vampire power cannot be killed with garlic or an iron spike through the heart. To combat these inv power strip, which looks like a regular power cord but generally has two or three slots that automatically detect if a

The Problem Solver found smart power strips for as little as \$15 online. Kolata said using them throughout your ho

Ca-ching.

You can also save money by checking your television's brightness setting. Most new TVs are sold pre-set at an over

simply changing your television's brightness setting to "standard" or "home," you can save up to \$50 per year, Kola



If you have kids at home who like to play video games, make sure they turn the console off. Consoles like Sony PlayStation 3 or Microsoft Xbox 360 use the most energy. By turning it off, you can save up to \$50 per year. By contrast, the Nintendo Wii uses the least energy. If you turn it off between uses, you can save even more, according to CUB calculations.

For computer users, make sure you use "sleep" mode or the "power management" mode. A computer that stays on with the screensaver bouncing around can cost you up to \$75 a year, Kolata says.

Instead of using regular light bulbs, switch to compact fluorescent bulbs adorned with the Energy Star logo. The DOE says the average household spends about 11 percent of its energy budget on lighting.

Compact fluorescent light bulbs use up to 75 percent less energy than standard incandescent bulbs, the DOE says.

"It's never been easier to save money while saving energy because the technology is out there," said Chris Kielich, spokesman for the DOE.

Not that it's all high-tech. Kielich said that a few outdoor landscaping changes can provide shade to your air conditioning unit. A tree in your living room can also reduce your dependency on AC.

Back inside, eliminate air leaks around windows that can account for up to 20 percent of your heating and cooling costs. Weatherstripping and insulation to seal cracks around windows, door frames, attic eaves and electrical outlets can save you up to \$470 a year, according to the DOE.

Even easier: raise your thermostat a few degrees in the summer, which can save you up to \$180 per year, according to the DOE. Use a ceiling fan with the blades spinning counter-clockwise. The movement creates a downward breeze.

You can also install a programmable thermostat (the Problem Solver found several online for less than \$30). The thermostat can be set to a higher temperature, raising it while you are away and lowering it when you are home. Kolata said a programmable thermostat can save you up to \$180 per year.

"You just set it and forget it," Kielich said.

Sounds good to me.

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