

Tips for Conserving Energy and Lowering Your Winter Heating Bills

Driven to Deliver

With cold weather comes higher natural gas bills. For customers with average usage, their highest winter bill amount is about five times more than their lowest summer bill. Gas furnaces are the single biggest user of natural gas.

Every home and business is unique, the size and number of people in your household or business affects your gas usage. You can control some of the factors that go into your natural gas bill, including conservation efforts, your hot water usage, the temperature you set your thermostat during the day and night, how efficiently you use your gas appliances, how well your home is insulated and weatherized and purchase of energy efficient equipment. There are simple things you can do today and over the long-term to help lower your winter heating bills and reduce your natural gas usage.



STEPS YOU CAN TAKE RIGHT AWAY

- Close your evaporative (“swamp”) cooler dampers before winter. Sliding it into place will stop cold air from coming indoors and keep warm air from escaping outside through the opening to your swamp cooler. Alternately, some swamp cooler models are designed to be covered for the winter.
- Make sure your fireplace dampers are closed when not in use.
- Set your thermostat only to the temperature you would like to reach. Turning it to the highest temperature does not warm up a cold building any faster.
- Furnaces run more during the night when the outside temperatures drop. Lowering your thermostat 5 to 10 degrees can help save energy. A programmable thermostat can do this for you.
- Close off vents and doors to rooms and areas of the house that are unused. Make sure there are no exposed pipes in those areas that could freeze.
- Maintain the humidity inside your home at 20 to 40 percent during the winter to help you feel warmer. Humidifiers, aquariums and houseplants can help add humidity.
- Caulk, seal and weather-strip seams, cracks and openings where warm air can escape and cold air can come into your home, such as around windows and doors, electrical outlets, light and plumbing fixtures, attic entrances, ducts and chimney flashing.
- Have your furnace professionally checked every year before turning it on to make sure it is operating safely and efficiently. Visit our Web site, at www.nmgco.com/Furnace_Safety_Checks, for safety information.
- Change your furnace filter once a month during the winter heating season to help your furnace work more efficiently and reduce your heating costs. Your monthly gas bill can be a reminder on when to change your filter.
- Open the drapes when the sun is shining and close them at night to help retain inside heat.
- Keep heater registers and radiators free from obstructions so the warm air can circulate. Be careful not to block the vents in areas where gas appliances are stored.
- As much as 25 percent of every energy dollar goes towards heating water. Lower your water heater’s temperature setting to 120 degrees Fahrenheit to lower water heating costs.
- If you have a water heater manufactured before 2001 or with an R-value under R-24, you may benefit by adding water heater wrap insulation. See our Web site at www.nmgco.com/Water_Heater_Savings for more information.
- By using less hot water, you will use less energy. Clean and wash clothes using cold water as much as possible. Set the proper water level for your laundry load size to conserve hot water. Check your faucets for leaks that waste water and energy.
- Consider insulating your water pipes, even just the first three feet of pipes entering and leaving the water heater tank can save energy.
- Turn the water heater thermostat down or off when you’re gone for more than three days. Many new water heaters have a “vacation” setting you can use.
- Twice a year (or every other month if you have hard water), drain a bucket of water from your hot water heater storage tank. This removes sediment which absorbs heat energy and results in higher heating costs.
- If you’re building a new home, locate the water heater as close as possible to the kitchen, laundry room and bathrooms to reduce heat loss as it moves through long pipes.
- A bath uses about five times the hot water of a shower.
- Install low-flow showerheads and faucets to conserve hot water. Buy from a participating retailer and get a \$7 point-of-purchase rebate. A new low-flow showerhead can save approximately 7,500 gallons of water a year, which results in less water to heat and additional energy savings.
- Visit our Web site at www.nmgco.com/Water_Heater_Savings for information on purchasing energy efficient hot water heaters.



LONG-TERM STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

- Check insulation levels in your attic, exterior and basement walls, ceilings, floors and crawl spaces.
- Adding insulation to the attic is a relatively easy and cost effective task. Measure the thickness of your existing insulation and if it is less than R- 11 (11 inches of fiber glass or rock wool or 8 inches of cellulose), you can benefit by adding more.
- If your home is older, consider adding insulation to reduce your energy costs. Only about 20 percent of homes built before 1980 are well-insulated by today's energy efficiency standards. While adding insulation to exterior walls, crawl spaces or basements is more expensive and usually requires a contractor, it may be worthwhile.
- If, from the inside, your door to the outside feels colder than the inside walls, it might be time to install a better insulated door. Consider installing storm or thermal windows and doors, or double-paned glass. A less expensive alternative is to use plastic sheeting to help prevent drafts and retain heat.
- For more information on insulation, including insulation rebates, visit our Web site www.nmgco.com/Residential_Insulation_Rebate. There are additional resources from the U.S. Department of Energy, including recommended insulation levels and cost analyses.



Need Help With Heating Bills?

If you need help paying your winter heating bills, please contact us. Our customer service representatives can provide helpful information.

LIHEAP is a program through the N.M. Human Services Dept. that offers assistance with winter heating bills for income-qualifying residents. To learn how to apply and to get an application for LIHEAP, visit our Web site at www.nmgco.com/LIHEAP or call us. Applications are accepted beginning Oct. 1.

If you meet income qualifications, are elderly, disabled or have other special circumstances, you may also be eligible for an extended payment plan and other assistance. Call for more information.

Our HEAT New Mexico Fund, administered by the Salvation Army, is also available to help income-qualifying customers pay their winter heating bills. To apply, first apply for LIHEAP. For more information, call the Salvation Army at 505-872-1171 and visit our Web site, www.nmgco.com/Heat_New_Mexico.

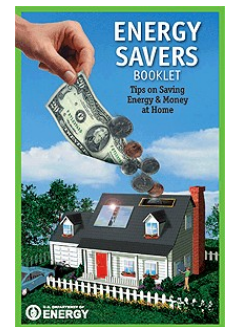
We also work with the N.M. Mortgage Finance Authority to provide assistance to income qualified customers to help improve the energy efficiency of their homes and lower their utility bills. We sponsor the N.M. EnergySmart program, which offers our income-qualifying customers free home weatherization and installs energy-saving measures. More information is available at www.nmgco.com/Low_Income_Energy_Efficiency_Assistance.



Rebates!

For information on energy efficiency rebates on the purchase of energy efficient products for your home or business, visit www.nmgco.com/Energy_Efficiency

Many more energy saving tips are available in the booklet, **Energy Savers — Tips on Saving Energy & Money at Home**, from the U.S. Dept. of Energy. To download a free copy, visit: www.eere.energy.gov/consumer/tips.



Worried about your high winter bills?

If you experience higher than usual winter bills or have concerns about unanticipated higher gas usage, please contact us immediately. Our Customer Service Representatives will be happy to help examine your account and, if necessary, our service technicians will check your gas service.

To help make budgeting easier and avoid large fluctuations in your gas bills, we also offer Budget Billing. With this free and convenient service, your payments throughout the year are evened out so that you pay the same amount each month. For more information on Budget Billing and to enroll, please visit our Web site at www.nmgco.com/Budget_Billing or call us.



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Call center hours: 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. 24/7 Emergency response