



Energy Use – Myths versus Reality

By Tom Lienhard, PE, CEM

Most people are looking for ways to reduce their energy use, but sometimes what we do can actually increase energy use. Do you know what is an energy myth and what is a fact?

Myth: It takes as much energy to reheat your home as you save when lowering your thermostat while you're away.

Reality: Setting your thermostat back a few degrees while you're away or sleeping at night will always use less energy than keeping the thermostat at a constant higher temperature. That's because of heat transfer – the difference between the temperature of your home and the outside temperature. The colder your house gets in winter, the slower it loses heat. The warmer you keep your home in winter, the more it can lose heat. The key is to seal air leaks in your home, ensure adequate insulation and use a programmable thermostat.

Myth: If I use a high quality pleated filter in my furnace, I don't need to change it as often.

Reality: The better your filter is at catching dirt, the more often you need to change it. Pleated filters are more effective, arresting more particles than non-pleated filters. It's a good idea to change your pleated filter once a month to keep your furnace operating efficiently.

Myth: I use less energy when my freezer or refrigerator is empty.

Reality: A full refrigerator or freezer uses less energy because air is more difficult to keep cold than the thermal mass of liquids and solids. An energy savings solution is to fill empty plastic milk or water containers with water and place them in your freezer or refrigerator to the fill empty space.

Myth: Closing off vents and rooms will save energy.

Reality: Zoning or closing off rooms can save energy in a system where each room has its own heating source and control. However, natural gas, oil and propane furnaces, as well as electric heat pumps were designed to have all registers and grills open in order to operate efficiently. It's a good idea to check with an HVAC professional before closing off vents.

Tom Lienhard is a lead engineer at Avista. You can reach him with questions and comments at askavista@avistautilities.com