



Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel

Your Residential Utility Consumer Advocate

CONSUMERS' FACT SHEET

Utility questions, concerns or complaints?

**CALL TOLL FREE:
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BEAT THE HEAT: SUMMER COOLING TIPS



During the hot summer months, many Ohioans look for ways to beat the heat. There are several ways you can keep your home cool and save money on your energy bills when it is hot outside.

Blocking heat from reaching the home

There are many ways to block heat from reaching a home. Shading works most efficiently when it blocks the heat before it reaches your home. Exterior shading is created by planting trees, shrubs and tall plants around the home, preferably on the south and west sides. Interior shading includes blinds, drapes and window treatments. Another way to block heat is to insulate the attic and walls of your home. Using a thin, plastic film that sticks to windows blocks the heat while letting the light in. Finally, a no-cost option is to reduce the number of appliances and lights you use during the warmest part of the day.

Using fans

You may be able to enhance air conditioning with the use of fans. Fans create breezes and move air from one area to another. They also move heat away from your body and help cool you by evaporating sweat. To save energy, turn off fans when leaving a room. Using fans during mild weather and at night can save up to 50 percent in cooling costs and reduce the need to use an air conditioner.

Whole house fans

You can reduce the indoor temperature 3 to 8 degrees, depending on the outside temperature, by using a whole house or attic fan. It is best to use whole house fans during cooler times of the day or at night. A whole house fan pulls in air from open windows and exhausts warm air out through the attic and roof vents. You should not use whole house fans while an air conditioner is in use. For the whole house fan to work properly, the house must have large attic vents and windows must be open for pressure relief.

Ventilating fans

Overusing ventilation fans can pull cool air out of the home and increase energy costs. Limited use of ventilating fans, however, can circulate the air to make you feel cooler by exhausting hot air to the outside.

Ceiling fans

Ceiling fans are most effective in large rooms. They produce higher air speeds with less noise than box or oscillating fans. When using a ceiling fan with air conditioning, you can set the thermostat higher than normal while maintaining a comfortable temperature. Make sure the fan blades are moving in a counter-clockwise direction so air blows toward the floor to cause a cooling effect.

Air conditioners and dehumidifiers

Air conditioners are an easy way to cool a room or home and are best if used with other cooling methods.

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The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC), the residential utility consumer advocate, represents the interests of 4.5 million households in proceedings before state and federal regulators and in the courts.

The state agency also educates consumers about electric, natural gas, telephone and water issues and resolves complaints from individuals.

To receive utility information, brochures, schedule a presentation or file a utility complaint, residential consumers may call 1-877-PICKOCC (1-877-742-5622) toll free in Ohio or visit the OCC website at www.pickocc.org.



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When using an air conditioner, do not set the thermostat lower than the desired temperature. The recommended temperature is 78 degrees. Raising the temperature 5 degrees for eight hours can lower your household's electric bill by as much as 10 percent. Using a fan with the air conditioner can help better circulate the cooler air.

To increase energy efficiency, be sure to purchase the correct size air conditioner for the space you will be cooling. In this case, bigger does not always equal better. If you buy an air conditioner that is bigger than you need, it can cost you more to run the unit, as well as being more expensive to purchase. An air conditioning unit that is too big will cycle on and off more frequently, causing the indoor temperature to fluctuate more, reducing the amount of moisture that is removed and creating a less comfortable climate.

Also, have your air conditioner checked before each cooling season and either clean or replace the filter monthly or as often as recommended for your unit. When buying a new air conditioner, look for an Energy Star-rated unit and hire a qualified contractor to install it properly.

Window air conditioners

As with home air conditioners, have your window unit checked before each cooling season and clean or replace filters monthly. Turn off or reduce settings when you leave a room. You can reduce the amount of air that needs to be cooled by closing a room's door and keeping windows closed.

There are several items you should consider before buying a window unit:

- ▶ Does the electrical system need to be upgraded?
- ▶ Do you need to add a grounded outlet?
- ▶ Do you need an appliance grade extension cord?
- ▶ What are the costs involved? Include the initial purchase and installation cost as well as the cost to run the unit.
- ▶ How do you get the correctly sized unit?

Heat pumps

A heat pump draws warm air from your home and releases it outdoors. It also dehumidifies the indoor air as it cools it. The cooled, dehumidified air is forced by a fan into your home's duct system, which in turn circulates it throughout the home.

Dehumidifiers

Although dehumidifiers remove moisture from the air, they cause heat to flow back into your home. To control moisture and reduce the need for a dehumidifier, keep your basement door closed if you have windows open.

Also, open bathroom windows and keep the door closed when showering to vent the heat and humidity outside.

Heat producers

Keep heat producers away from your thermostat and turn off unnecessary heat-producing devices, such as incandescent light bulbs and electronics, including computers. Use a microwave instead of a conventional oven. Do not use your dishwasher's dry cycle; instead, let the dishes air dry. Wash and dry clothes when the day is cool and air dry them when possible. Also, cut back on boiling and baking during the summer.

Other cool tips for you

Drink lots of water and wear short-sleeved, loose, light-colored clothing. Take cooler showers and if you cannot get to a lake or local swimming pool, let a sprinkler water you and your plants. A basement, which is often cooler than the rest of a house, might be the place to take refuge from the heat.

For information on energy efficiency, contact the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel toll free at 1-877-PICKOCC (1-877-742-5622) to request "Smart Energy Tips" or visit online at www.pickocc.org. Many Ohio utilities also have energy efficiency programs that will help you save money while keeping cool in the summer. Contact your local utility for more information about available programs.