



Florida Public Service Commission

Consumer Bulletin

Lila A. Jaber, Chairman



Finding Help with Energy Conservation

Increases in fuel prices have some consumers thinking about ways to cut home energy costs. The question homeowners face is where to start looking for ways to conserve.

The first place to start looking is with your electric service provider. The good news is that all of Florida's investor-owned utilities and a number of municipal electric utilities offer programs to help consumers cut back on energy use. The better news is that most of these programs are easily understood and free of technical jargon. A phone call to the customer service number on your monthly bill is the first step in determining what type of assistance is available.

The program most commonly offered by electric utilities is an energy audit, sometimes referred to as a conservation audit, an energy survey, or an energy check. An audit is intended to identify no-cost or low-cost energy-saving practices for the consumer, and to increase consumer awareness of available conservation measures. Audits can take a number of forms, with the simplest being a mail-in form prepared by the consumer according to directions provided by the utility. Some utilities have expanded their mail-in audits to allow consumers to submit information using the telephone or the Internet. Utilities also offer different levels of walk-through audits by an energy auditor. Simple walk-through energy audits are conducted without charge. More elaborate, computer-assisted audits may incur a fee, as do design-assistance audits for home builders.

Many utilities offer a program to test leakage from air ducts within a home and will recommend repairs that can minimize inefficiencies, saving consumers money. Utilities may charge up to \$25 for the test, which pressurizes the ducting system and identifies sources of leaks. In exchange, the utilities offer consumers credits for the cost to repair leaks.

Ceiling insulation programs remain an inexpensive option for residential consumers. By increasing the insulation value to a specific level, consumers reduce the demand for energy by decreasing the load on air conditioning and heating equipment. Select utilities offer incentives in the form of certificates consumers can present to contractors to apply to the cost of the insulation.

A number of electric utilities offer incentives for consumers interested in updating high-efficiency heat pumps and/or central air conditioning systems. Incentives may take the form of low-interest loans, cash incentives to consumers, and cash incentives to dealers selling the more efficient units. Consumers who may be considering upgrades to heating and air conditioning systems on their own initiative may wish to contact their utility to determine what programs may be available. While this option is more expensive than some of the low-cost choices already mentioned, the benefits can be substantial. An older heating unit – more than 15 years old, for example – may convert 60 to 70 percent of its energy into heat, while modern systems are 80 to 95 percent efficient. This can translate into a savings of up to 30 percent on a residential bill.

Energy conservation is a goal that serves the interests of consumers and utilities alike. A wide array of options are available to consumers, and a good place to start looking for help is with your electric service provider.

Lila A. Jaber is the Chairman of the Florida Public Service Commission. The PSC sets the rates regulated utility companies charge for natural gas, electric and telephone service within the state. In 36 counties, it sets the price you pay for the water you drink, if your water company is privately owned. Chairman Jaber is also a member of the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service and the state chair of the Federal-State Joint Conference on Advanced Telecommunications Services.