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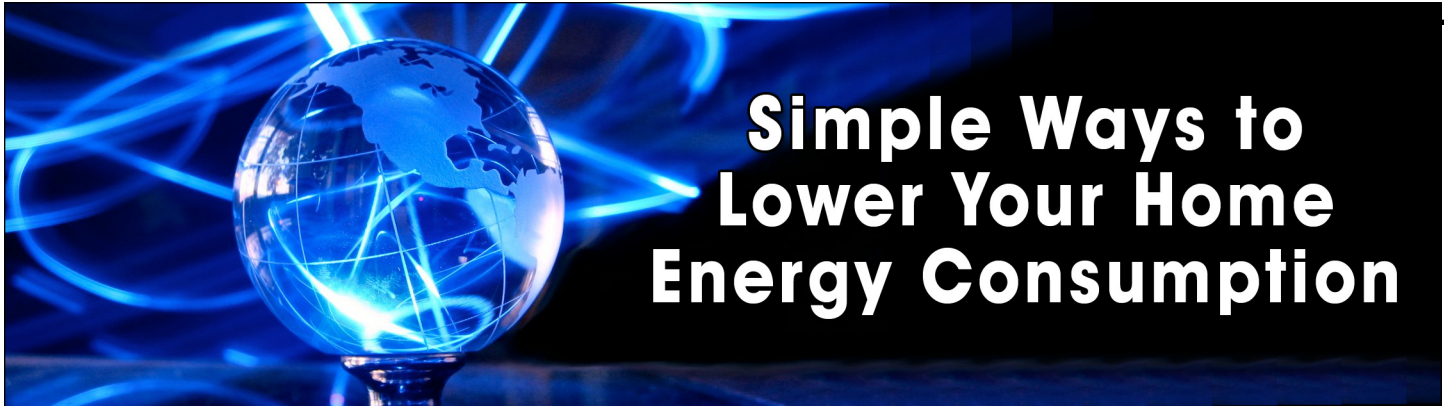
Serving The Entire Black Hills Region

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Lower You're Home Energy Consumption

By: Patrick Breen

You're an adult now, all grown up, and proud to say you are a homeowner. Every month you sit down to pay the utilities, watching money fly out the door. Every month you also remember your parents' admonishments when you were a kid, "Turn off those lights if you're done in there!" or "Close that door! Were you born in a barn!"

You, like your parents, are now looking for every way to lower those monthly bills. Your budget might not allow replacing an older furnace, or installing new windows; and while turning off lights is good advice you are looking for a bit more help. Here are a few suggestions that will lower your energy consumption with just a few minor life adjustments and minimum investment.

Turn your computer off when you're done. If you need your computer left running, turn off your monitor. Computers account for 3% of all energy consumed in the United States. Also, keep your chargers unplugged when not in use. Chargers draw a current by just being plugged into an outlet.

Increasing the amount of daylight coming into your home lessens the need to turn on lights. Consider bouncing light deep into your home with the use of light shelves, light tubes and selectively painting your walls and ceilings with lighter colored paints.

A light shelf is a reflective shelf near a window that will bounce the visible light up onto the ceiling and then down farther into the room. If the ceiling and walls are light in color the effect is magnified. A light tube combines the principle of bouncing light with that of a skylight. The advantages of a light tube is that it is flexible, it is easy to install, can be placed in almost any location in your home and is much less expensive than installing a skylight.

Your common sense tells you to keep doors and windows closed while trying to heat or cool the house; but maybe you need to look a little closer at insulating them. Check for cracks and gaps around all your windows and doors and seal them with rope caulking. Weather strip your doors. If your windows are single pane install storm windows, but if your budget doesn't allow that consider applying shrink-wrap on the interior.

While cooking consider the fact that microwave ovens use less energy than conventional ovens and convection ovens require 20% less energy than conventional. Match your heating element to your pan size and use lids to lessen cooking time.

When washing clothes wait until you have a full load, and don't use high temperatures unless your cloths are extremely soiled. Clean your lint trap before every use. This small step will help you avoid a potential lint fire and dry your cloths faster.

By following these simple steps you will not only lower your utility bills, you may also find you'll be able to save more and be able to then invest it a new high-energy efficient furnace.