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87 days.

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Reducing our energy consumption

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PHIL RIDGE

It didn't take much effort but I got my family of three to reduce electricity consumption by 56 per cent following a few simple steps.

Our reduction over the last year: **June 2006:** 1,761 kilowatt hours.

June 2007: 1,002 kilowatt hours. (this was the start of our efforts).

Aug. 2006: 2,396 kilowatt hours.

Aug. 2007: 942 kilowatt hours. **Oct. 2006:** 2,361 kilowatt hours.

Oct. 2007: 936 kilowatt hours.

Dec. 2006: 1,964 kilowatt hours.

Dec. 2007: 821 kilowatt hours.

In six months, from the first of June to December 2007, we reduced our consumption from 8,482 kilowatt hours to 3,701.

What are some of the things I did?

I purchased a readout meter that connects to the main panel and measures electricity usage.



After I first plugged it in, I saw that my house was using more than one kilowatt when I thought everything was turned off. I hunted around and found the stereo was on at 300W plus various light bulbs.

I watched the readout of the device as I turned off each circuit breaker in turn, then I tried to find out what was using the electricity. This only took an hour or so.

A quick glance at my usage meter (it's in the kitchen) before I go out or last thing before I go to bed assures me that everything is turned off.

My standby power, when everything is off, is only 80 Watts.

I replaced our light bulbs with the new improved compact fluorescent bulbs. These emit a more reasonable light than the ones that came out a few years back – now my wife thinks the light is pleasant. This was a big battle.

I changed some of our bad habits. This was the hardest battle of all. I had my son repeating over and over that he had to turn out the lights when he left a room. He finally got it (he's only 6) and my wife is pretty good but I find I am still turning out the lights after her. Of course, she turns out the lights after me sometimes, too.

We also turn off the computers, printers and Internet each night – this was a significant saving.

The fridge and freezer in the basement are off, too. We just turn them on for family gatherings and parties.

I purchased a high-efficiency SEER 14 central air conditioner, new Energy Star windows, Energy Star washing machine and dishwasher, plus one six-litre toilet.

This year I plan to put more insulation in the attic and buy a new high-efficiency furnace with a DC motor – the new motor will save us \$200 a year in electricity.

During the shoulder months when there is no heat or air conditioning on, we use only six kilowatt hours per day – the average in Canada is 24 kilowatt hours per day!

I am an energy adviser performing energy assessments in homes and I tell people that if they were to accidentally leave an iron on for a whole day, this is as much electricity as I use in a whole month.

Overall I would say that what I did was straightforward and not hard to do. Some change of habits and a feedback device, some investments in energy efficient products – that's about it. If my family can do it, anyone can.

My next project is to reduce garbage and send the packaging back to the manufacturer.

Phil Ridge lives in Toronto.

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