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Winter Heating Costs and Conservation Tips

The struggle to keep up with the fluctuating cost of gasoline and groceries to fulfill their everyday needs throughout the past months has put many Missourians on a tight budget. With Christmas right around the corner, Missourians continue to pinch pennies in order to fuel their cars, fill their fridges, and now – heat their homes.

According to the [St. Louis Post-Dispatch](#), this winter's heating bills are expected to be higher than last year's. That's because many Missourians use natural gas to heat their homes. It is estimated that heating bills will climb 10 percent in our state.

Natural gas has become an important source for energy production in Missouri. It's the fuel of choice for many developing production plants. Our state has very limited fossil fuel resources. In fact, almost all of the coal, petroleum, and natural gas used in Missouri is imported from other states.

Our world's present coal, oil, and natural gas supply is finite and non-renewable. By switching to renewable energy sources, such as solar, wind, and biomass energy, Missourians would be able to remove themselves from their heavy reliance on nonrenewable resources.

It's also important that we look at ways to conserve the energy produced by any type of resource. The [U.S. Department of Energy's Energy Savers Consumer Tips website](#) provides several helpful suggestions to consumers in order for them conserve energy and save money along the way.

Using Furnaces and Heaters

- Set your thermostat to a comfortably low level (68 degrees is a common setting). For every degree you lower your thermostat, you can cut your heating costs between one and three percent.
- Turn your thermostat down 10-15 degrees while you sleep or when you are not at home in order to save more money on your heating bill. Using a programmable thermostat is an easy way to accomplish this.

- Clean or replace air filters on furnaces once a month (or as needed), and clean warm-air registers, baseboard heaters, and radiators as needed. Make sure these items are not blocked by furniture, carpeting, or window coverings
- Have your furnace serviced before each heating season to ensure it is operating safely and efficiently.

Weatherizing Your Home

- Keep your drapes and shades on the south-facing windows of your home open during the day to allow sunlight to enter and heat your home. Remember to close them at night to reduce the chill from cold windows.
- Caulk and weatherstrip doors and windows that leak air, and seal air leaks where ducting, plumbing, light fixtures, or electrical wiring penetrates through exterior walls, floors, and ceilings.
- To prevent cold air from entering your house, check to see that your fireplace damper is tightly closed when your fireplace is not in use.

There are also programs available that assist low-income Missourians with their heating bills. Through a contract with the Missouri Department of Social Services (DSS), local community action agencies are now accepting applications for Missouri's Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). This program is a federally funded program and additional funds are appropriated by Utilicare, which is the state funded portion of LIHEAP. Qualification for the program is based on income, number of people living in the home, and heating sources used in the residence. Applications for LIHEAP were mailed in September to those who received assistance last year. Applications are also available at community action agencies, various utilities, and on the DSS website (www.dss.mo.gov).

For more information on winter heating tips, visit the Missouri Department of Natural Resources' website (www.dnr.mo.gov). And if you have questions or comments about any other issue, please feel free to contact me at 573-751-8793 or by e-mail at: delbertscott@senate.mo.gov.

Senator Delbert Scott represents the people of Barton, Benton, Cedar, Dallas, Henry, Hickory, Pettis, Polk and St. Clair counties in the Missouri Senate.

