

“Putting the silver stake into energy vampires!”

by Randy Lueth

Last year the Sustainable Marshfield Committee issued a two part challenge. First, residential customers of the Marshfield Electric Utility are to become aware of their monthly power usage by examining their power bill. The second part of the challenge was to reduce power consumption and save money! For most of use saving money is always going to be a popular concept. We all need to be aware of the power we're using and then attempt to reduce that amount. The goal of this challenge continues to be not to reduce our quality of life but to make us all aware of the electricity that we are using inadvertently.

The first step of the Challenge is to find your most recent utility bill from Marshfield Utilities. Locate the line under 'electric' that says 'residential kWh'. This is the amount of power your household used between the last two meter readings, measured in kilowatt hours. That's using 1000 watts of energy for an hour, which is about what an electric oven uses. This number on your power bill will be a baseline for determining if you are reducing your power consumption from one month to the next.

The second part of the Challenge will take a little more effort and some persistence. We all enjoy the convenience that the multitude of electrical appliances and devices brings to our lives. We also are not a wasteful lot by nature as we hate to waste food or other resources. The problem often is that electricity is so convenient that we don't even think about our consumption. This is where the silver stake part comes in. Recently the electric devices that we typically leave plugged in, but are still using power even when they are turned off, have come to be called "energy vampires". They're sucking-up power and costing us money even when the switch says "off". Finding and removing these wasteful energy users can be as tough a challenge as any vampire slayer can have.

Televisions, VCR's, computers, cell phone chargers, game platforms, and many other devices are using power even when they are not turned on. Any device that has a digital clock or pilot light that comes on when it's 'plugged in' is consuming power.

Using a power strip to control the power use of your TV, VCR, cable tuner box and stereo equipment is an easy first step. Unplugging any charging device that is not in use will also stop that sucking sound you hear at your electric meter. If you enjoy the convenience of remotely controlled devices but want to shut down the flow of stand-by power you can use advanced power strips that sense the flow of energy to a master device and will shut off peripheral devices when a decrease in current is detected.

There are several great websites to give you an idea of the amount of power being consumed by these devices. Check out: <http://standby.lbl.gov/data.html> or <http://greenhome.huddler.com/wiki/how-to-reduce-vampire-power>. A Google Search for "vampire power" will also uncover a myriad of information and products.

Next month when that power bill shows up again, you can check your 'residential kWh' to see if you're starting to reduce the number of vampires in your home. Currently Marshfield residential customers use approximately 750 kWh per month. This may be the first time in your life that being below average is really a good thing! Good luck driving the silver stake into those power vampires!



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