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Green Your Home

Free and Easy:

- Adjust Your Water Heater**
Lower your water heater's thermostat to 120 degrees, to restrict heat loss.

- Fill the Dishwasher**
Run full loads, air dry, and skip the pre-rinsing. Energy Star dishwashers can be more efficient than hand washing, so consider replacing an older, less-efficient model.

- Green Your Garden**
Avoid harmful herbicides and pesticides in your garden; create and use compost; and practice organic gardening techniques.

- Moderate the Thermostat**
Lower the thermostat by just two degrees this winter to conserve energy without sacrificing comfort. Turn it down 10 degrees at night and when you're not home -- or install a programmable thermostat for automatic adjustments.

- Recycle**
According to the EPA, an average family of four that recycles only plastic waste can save the equivalent of nearly 340 pounds of carbon emissions per year. To find out about your local regulations or learn how to start a recycling program in your building, neighborhood, or city, visit earth911.org.

- Unplug Electronics**
Many household appliances continue to suck electricity even when switched off; minimize leaks by unplugging idle electronics.

Wash Laundry in Cold Water

About 90 percent of the energy used for a load of laundry goes to heating the water. Some stains demand hot water, as do bed linens (to kill dust mites). Wash all other loads in cold.

Small Purchases that Make a Big Difference:

Change Lightbulbs

Compact fluorescent lightbulbs consume a quarter of the electricity required by comparable incandescent bulbs and last up to 12 times longer. Maximize savings by changing at least five frequently used bulbs.

Go Low-Flow in the Shower

To reduce hot-water consumption, replace older showerheads with ones that spray no more than 2 1/2 gallons a minute.

Limit Artificial Fragrances

Experts' concerns about the proliferation of fragrances have to do with their potential effects on our health; essential oils and natural fragrances are safer alternatives.

Replace Chemical Cleaners

High-octane chemicals are known to be harmful to both your family's health and the environment; select natural cleaning and laundry products at the store, or use homemade natural cleansers.

Use Eco-Friendly Linens

Typical linens are made with conventional cotton, which accounts for about 25 percent of the world's insecticide use, and many manufacturers' dyes are derived from petroleum (a nonrenewable resource) in a highly polluting process. Choose an eco-friendly alternative such as organic cotton or renewable fibers such as bamboo instead.

Smart Investments:

Consider Eco-Flooring

Conventional flooring choices can harm the environment and potentially you and your family's health. Whether you're remodeling or simply want to replace your carpet, choose healthy, sustainable flooring materials such as bamboo, cork, true linoleum, natural-fiber carpet, or FSC-certified wood.

Paint Safely

Many paints contain volatile organic compounds (VOCs), which are linked to various health problems. When shopping for paint, choose low- or zero-VOC varieties, or paints made from natural materials, such as milk or clay paints.

Replace the Old Refrigerator

Refrigerators use more electricity than any other appliance. Older ones are worse, so give top priority to replacing a pre-1993 fridge.

Sleep on a Chemical-Free Mattress

Many mattresses are treated with toxic chemicals called PBDEs to reduce their flammability. To limit your exposure to these dangerous toxins, cover your mattress with an organic wool or latex pad, or when buying a new one, choose a PBDE-free mattress.

Upgrade Windows

Energy Star-qualified windows with insulating glazes, gas fills, and better framing materials reduce the demand on heating and cooling systems, saving energy and money.