HOME AND GARDEN COLUMN

ENERGY

Many politicians and business leaders are keeping a close watch on what will be the true impact of the latest national energy policy.

Closer to home, consumers can make choices at the cash register that have an immediate impact on personal budgets. Shopping for good buys on light bulbs and appliances can make a difference on cash flow at the end of the month.

Though we don’t have control over the cost of power, the price per kilowatt of energy used, we do have choices over how much power we use. Some choices can be made when we shop but others are best made during the construction process.

Relamping or replacing commonly used regular incandescent light bulbs with more energy efficient compact fluorescent lamps will save you in several ways. US EPA has calculated a $60 annual savings for replacing just 5 incandescent bulbs.

Compact fluorescent lamps are better at converting electric energy into light energy so there is an automatic savings every time you need light. In addition, since compact fluorescents are cooler light sources, they produce less heat that needs to be compensated for by the air conditioning system so you also save money on the air conditioning part of your electric bill every month.

Common turnoff for consumers have been purchase price and looks. The older compact fluorescent lamps looked out of place in table lamps and they didn’t fit in track lighting and some other fixtures. Prices on compact lamps have come down significantly and now you can find a variety of shapes and types for a multitude of uses. Some are labeled as "dimmable lamps" so you can safely use them in fixtures equipped with dimmer switches. Be sure to check the label to avoid fire hazards.

There are mini twists that fit in smaller fixtures including bathroom fans and ceiling fixtures. I recently saw some suitable for decorative fixtures such as chandeliers. Special reflector covers are made that increase light intensity and make them suitable for overhead spot lights or outdoor flood lights. There are even decorative globes suitable for bathroom vanity fixtures. You will immediately feel a temperature difference near the fixtures if you replace these with compact fluorescents. Some fixtures are sold with Energy Star labels but you can also buy regular fixtures and use compact fluorescent lamps in them.

Originally, fluorescents produced mostly blue light and were not desirable in food serving areas or for makeup areas in the bathroom because illuminated items looked off color. Now, compact fluorescents have been designed with a better color rendering index or CRI so they produce light that is in a more natural range. You can find this information on the label of better brands.

Another purchase that can result in monthly saving is appliances including refrigerators, washing machines and dishwashers. Even stereos and televisions have Energy Star labels. The blue and white logo is your visual cue that the items are designed to use less energy compared to similar models.

Savings when purchasing electronics is significant since we seem to have more and more equipment that is on even when it is off. Turn off the lights in your house and see how many items still have a glowing red light indicating power is available. This trickle of energy adds up. Energy Star products use LED and other technologies to save energy when appliances are in use as well as when they are not.

For more information on energy conservation during the construction process, contact UF/IFAS Osceola County Extension at 321-697-300 or email to efoe@osceola.org
Osceola County Greenways and Trails Planning Team has organized Stroll, Roll and Paddle for National Trails Day, Saturday, June 4. Take a bike ride around Kissimmee or take a historic walk through downtown or paddle on Lake Toho for an early morning activity. All participants rendezvous at the Kissimmee Lakefront Park. Pre-register and get more details by calling Osceola County Parks Dept. at 407-343-7173.

Interested in the environment? Want to find out where to visit our natural parks? What is happening with Osceola County’s land acquisition program? Want to meet others who are actively working toward improving our quality of life? Contact UF/IFAS Osceola County Extension for notice of upcoming meetings and activities or check the website often at http://osceola.ifas.ufl.edu/nat/natrec.htm. The next meeting is scheduled for early June so act fast to get the details.

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