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January 2010

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Affordable Long Distance Service

Austin Utilities and Freeborn Mower Cooperative are offering a great new long distance plan through TransWorld Network (TWN).

Pay just 6.9¢ a minute, anytime, state-to-state and just 8.9¢ a minute in-state. No restrictions. No monthly service charges.

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Winter Energy Saving Tips

Here you'll find strategies to help you save energy during the cold winter months. Some of the tips below are free and can be used on a daily basis to increase your savings; others are simple and inexpensive actions you can take to ensure maximum savings through the winter.

If you haven't already, conduct an energy audit to find out where you can save the most, and consider making a larger investment for long-term energy savings.

Take Advantage of Heat from the Sun

- Open curtains on your south-facing windows during the day to allow sunlight to naturally heat your home, and close them at night to reduce the chill you may feel from cold windows.

Cover Drafty Windows

- Use a heavy-duty, clear plastic sheet on a frame or tape clear plastic film to the inside of your window frames during the cold winter months. Make sure the plastic is sealed tightly to the frame to help reduce infiltration.
- Install tight-fitting, insulating drapes or shades on windows that feel drafty after weatherizing.

Adjust the Temperature

- When you are home and awake, set your

thermostat as low as is comfortable.

- When you are asleep or out of the house, turn your thermostat back 10°–15° for eight hours and save around 10% a year on your heating and cooling bills. A programmable thermostat can make it easy to set back your temperature.
- Find out how to operate your thermostat for maximum energy savings.

Find and Seal Leaks

- Seal the air leaks around utility cut-throughs for pipes (plumbing penetrations), gaps around chimneys, and recessed lights in insulated ceilings, and unfinished spaces behind cupboards and closets.
- Add caulk or weather-stripping to seal air leaks around leaky doors and windows.
- Find how to select and apply the appropriate caulk.

Maintain Your Heating Systems

- Schedule service for your heating system.
- Find out what maintenance is required to keep your heating system operating efficiently.
- Furnaces: Replace your furnace filter once a month or as needed.

Source: Dept of Energy

Austin Utilities Office will be closed
January 18, 2010
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day



Space Heaters

The ads are starting to come in...Save BIG this winter! Cut your heating bill! Pays for itself in a matter of weeks! Some of them are even promoting a healthier home. What is this magical thing that will make our lives so much better? Space heaters.

A space heater does have its uses, but the only way to potentially save money is to use a heater in one room and leave the rest of the house cooler.

Most of these heaters are 1,500 watt heaters. If a 1,500 watt heater is plugged in for one hour—it will use 1.5 Kwh. You are billed per Kwh (kilowatthour). Let's say you have a 1,500 watt heater that runs 12 hours per day, for 30 days. At a rate of 10.48 cents per kwhr, it would cost you \$56.59 for one month to run your

electric space heater.

Another thing to remember is the cost of the heater. There is a huge difference in price, ranging from \$50 to over \$400. Expensive does not mean better. If you are in the market, shop around for one with a temperature control, decide if you want convection or radiant and check out the length of the cord. If using an extension cord, make sure it is a 12 or 14 gauge model. Buy a heater listed by Underwriters Laboratories and consider a model with a tip-over switch and automatic shut-off of heat protection.

Remember to be safe. Do not place heaters close to furniture and window treatments, keep out of reach of small children and turn off the heater when you leave home.

Prevent frozen pipes

Don't fall into a winter cold snap unprepared. Prevent property damage, repair bills, and the inconvenience of bursting household pipes by following the suggestions below.

- ◆ Know the location of your water shut-off valve and regularly test it. In most single-family homes, the shut-off valve is in the basement or crawl space on a wall facing the street.
- ◆ Turn off and drain automatic and manual sprinkler systems.
- ◆ Insulate water pipes that may be vulnerable to the cold or have posed problems before. Pipes close to exterior walls or in unheated basements can be wrapped with pieces of insulation. Don't overlook pipes near windows, which can quickly freeze. For particularly difficult pipes, consult a professional on how to select and apply heat tape. Improper insulation can cause fires. If you need help, hire a qualified contractor.
- ◆ Seal leaks that allow cold air inside, near where pipes are located. Look for air leaks around electrical wiring, dryer vents and pipes. Use caulk or insulation to keep the cold out and the heat in. With severe cold, a tiny

opening can let in enough cold air to cause a pipe to freeze.

- ◆ Crack a faucet farthest from the place where your water enters the home. A very slow drip will keep water molecules moving, reducing the chance that pipes will freeze. Don't forget to place a bucket underneath the faucet so the water can be saved for other household uses.
- ◆ Don't take chances. If you turn on your faucets and nothing comes out, leave the faucets turned on and call a plumber. If you detect that your water pipes have frozen and burst, turn off the water at the main shut-off valve in the house; leave the water faucets turned on. (Make sure everyone in your family knows where the water shut-off valve is and how to open and close it.)
- ◆ Never try to thaw a pipe with a torch or other open flame. Water damage is preferable to burning down your house. You may be able to thaw a frozen pipe with the warm air from a hair dryer. Start by warming the pipe as close to the faucet as possible, working toward the coldest section of pipe.

Austin Utilities would like to remind all natural gas customers of the importance of removing snow and ice from around their gas meter. Accumulations of snow and ice can cause serious damage to the gas meter and could result in temporary loss of natural gas supply to a customers home or business. Additionally, removal of snow and ice around outside meters, allows meter readers the ability to accurately and efficiently read each meter.

According to Minnesota State Mechanical, Fuel Gas and Plumbing Code, unvented room heaters and unvented decorative appliances shall not be installed in any dwelling or occupancy. The use of these types of heaters is not approved for use by any Austin Utilities natural gas customer.

Installation of any new or additional gas burning appliance to existing gas piping in a building requires an inspect from Austin Utilities. For your safety, contact Austin Utilities Gas Department at 433-8886 to schedule an inspection at no cost.

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