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7 Tips To Slash Heating Bills ... Page 1 of 2

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## Seven Tips to Slash Soaring Home Heating Bills

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita will hit homeowners everywhere in the wallet this winter. The storms have caused real damage and disruption to the natural gas industry, adding to strains already caused by rising demand. Natural gas prices are now at a record high, and the Department of Energy states they will keep going up as the cold weather descends upon us. The “Energy Crisis” is back.

How high will natural gas prices rise? As much as a whopping 71% more this winter compared to last year. This will translate into a \$500 to \$800 jump in annual home and water heating bills for most homeowners and over \$1000 for many. While you can’t control the price of fuel, you can reduce how much you use. Here are seven tips from the Comfort Institute to make your home an energy sipper instead of a gas guzzler!

**1. Have your duct system tested for air leaks.** Many assume that windows and doors are the major cause of a home’s energy wasting air leaks. But according to recent research by the Department of Energy (DOE), gaps, joints and disconnections in the typical home’s duct system are much more significant. The DOE states that the typical duct system loses 25 to 40 percent of the energy put out by the central furnace or heat pump. Authorities recommend having a heating contractor test for leaks and then seal them with a brushed-on fiber-reinforced sealant. Duct tape usually dries out and fails. It turns out duct tape is great for many things, but sealing ducts isn’t one of them!

**2. Ask your contractor to perform an Infiltrometer “blower door” test.** The blower door is a computerized instrument originally invented by the Department of Energy. It pinpoints where your home’s worst air leaks are, such as duct leaks, and also measures how leaky the overall house is. Most homes have the equivalent of an open window in combined air leaks. Many heating contractors offer an Infiltrometer test as part of a “Whole House Health & Comfort Checkup” that also checks insulation levels and overall duct performance. Ask if they also provide an infra-red camera scan to pinpoint hidden heat leaks.

**3. Close your fireplace damper.** Did you remember to close it last time you used the fireplace? Shut it now or waste precious warm air all winter long!

**4. Replace your furnace or heat pump air filter.** Most systems need this done every month to ensure safe and efficient operation. Keep forgetting to do it? Ask your contractor for information on an extended surface area whole house air filter that only needs to be replaced once a year. It also does a far better job of keeping your equipment and the air in your home clean.

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**5. Have your heating system cleaned and tuned.** A pre-season tune up is a great investment. It reduces the chances of breakdowns on cold winter nights, improves safety, and more than pays for itself through more energy efficient operation. Ensure your contractor also performs a complete carbon monoxide safety check. For a free report: “How To Identify a Good Heating and Cooling Contractor”, go to [www.comfortinstitute.org](http://www.comfortinstitute.org).

**6. Install a programmable set-back thermostat.** Turn down your thermostat 8 degrees for 8 hours a day and you’ll save 8 percent on home heating costs. But you don’t have to sacrifice comfort! Ask your heating contractor to install a “programmable thermostat” that will turn the heat back up before you wake up or before you come home. New models are much easier to program.

**7. Consider replacing your old furnace or heat pump.** Just like a car, heating and cooling equipment doesn’t last forever. Is your system more than 12 years old? It probably wastes 35 cents out of every dollar you pay for fuel. Planning to stay in your home more than a few years? Many authorities recommend replacing it before it fails permanently. A new system is safer, improves comfort, is more dependable and creates less air pollution. New units pay for themselves over time as they only waste eight cents out of every dollars worth of gas. However, government and utility research has found that over 90% of newly installed high efficiency systems have energy wasting installation mistakes. Do some homework before talking to contractors. For more information, visit [www.energystar.gov](http://www.energystar.gov) and [www.comfortinstitute.org](http://www.comfortinstitute.org). Print out the free Comfort Institute report “Tips and Secrets To Buying A New Heating and Cooling System”.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Comfort Institute, Inc. is an international indoor comfort research, training and consumer protection organization based in Bellingham, Washington with trainers and offices located throughout the United States and Canada.

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A Digital High resolution color JPG photo is available on the Comfort Institute Media Support page.

**Photo caption: The Infiltrometer instrument pinpoints where energy wasting air leaks are, and measures your home’s fresh air exchange rate.**

For more information, or to conduct a phone interview, contact Brendan Reid, Senior Researcher at 800-742-1207 or by email: [breid@comfortinstitute.org](mailto:breid@comfortinstitute.org)

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