

EARTH FIRST

How to self audit energy use in your home

By Brian Phillips

Why self audit

When it comes to reducing carbon emissions we often ask ourselves what difference we can make when we are only one person in six billion on Earth. However, if each of us made a decision to act, especially in developed countries like our own, our billions of individual decisions would make a global difference. Governments alone cannot reduce carbon emissions. Our individual support is vital.

Many of us have taken action through installation of insulation, solar panels, water tanks, water efficient showerheads etc. Self auditing allows us to see the real benefits and rewards of our efforts.

Self auditing:

- allows us to measure household savings of water and energy.
- Allows us to set family goals to reduce water and energy consumption

Prepare

We can do this by becoming familiar with the systems set up for measurement of the supply of water and energy to our homes, and by regularly checking them, say, monthly. Having located the various meters, everyone capable in the household needs practice in reading them. Practice at reading meters is important when it comes to interpreting accounts. You need to be able to match the relevant numbers to your account.

Inform

Regular measurement and feedback is motivating, so family members need to be willing to do the auditing on a regular basis, such as once a month. Family members who volunteer can be rostered to regularly read the meters, and records can be kept in imaginative, highly visual ways such as graphs, charts etc. This way we can involve younger family members, and display proof of progress through comparison of monthly readings.

Progress

Evidence of the long term effectiveness of a household's water and energy savings can be provided through recording last year's consumption of electricity, gas, and water, and compare to this year. The only way to see whether the benefit is real, is to measure your consumption, **not** the size of the accounts, as prices per kWh and per m3 change almost every year.

At the end of this year it will be possible to compare your annual consumption to Council, State and Federal targets. On a more grassroots level you could organise a

community gathering such as a street party and discuss your energy improvement with your neighbours. Thus you may be able to help each other make further improvements through swapping tips, evaluating new appliances, etc.

Sustainable tip of the week: Ask your electrician or hardware supplier for a standby switch deactivation product. They cost around \$15. Standby power use is responsible for 10% of average household consumption.

Green dates for the calendar: Clean up Australia Day - Sunday March 7 (See <http://www.cleanupaustraliaday.org.au>) and National Groundwater Awareness Week (March 6 to 13).