

Heating choices that wont cost the earth this winter

EARTH FIRST

by Peter West, ECCO

With the onset of cooler weather, the need to keep warm at work, school and home becomes more important. Some of the best ways to keep warm this winter include dressing appropriately, changing your behaviour, ensure your home and workplace are well insulated, and use heaters efficiently. Here are some simple things you can do to keep warm this winter without costing the earth.

Insulation and draughts

Ensure your home is adequately insulated using roof and wall insulation, thick window curtains, and door and window seals. Insulation acts as a barrier to heat flow and is essential to keep your home warm in winter and cool over summer. A well insulated home will provide year round comfort, and can cut heating bills by up to 50 percent.

To prevent heat loss, make sure that all rooms, windows and doorways are sealed against draughts. Draughts can account for up to 25% of heat loss during winter. Double-glazed windows can also significantly reduce heat losses and keep your home comfortable all year round. In Orange's climate, winter heat losses typically occurs in ceilings (25-30%), walls (10-20%), windows (11-20%), air leakage (15-20%), and floors (10-20%).

Electric and gas heating

For most of us, the home-heating options include electric or gas heaters. Most electricity is generated through burning of coal – which we know releases significant carbon emissions into the atmosphere, and while natural gas generates less carbon dioxide emissions and very little sulphur dioxide, combustion of natural gas still produces nitrogen oxides and carbon monoxide in quantities comparable to coal burning.

Most energy providers now offer Certified Green Energy options, produced from renewable sources, such as wind or solar farms. These sources of energy can be used to heat your home, and are clean and environmentally responsible. Ask your energy provider about the options they can offer you. Alternatively, install solar panels yourself, and generate your own renewable electricity.

Whichever options you chose, you can prevent heat wastage and save money by only operating heaters while you are at home, by closing window curtains and blinds, only heating rooms that are being used, and turning off heaters before you go to bed.

Wood fire heaters

While the warmth and atmosphere created by wood fires can be appealing, it is important to be aware that wood fires cause significant air pollution by producing wood smoke. A smouldering wood fire will emit lots of smoke, soot, particles, odours, carbon monoxide and a range of toxic compounds that adversely affect air

quality. These can cause serious health problems in our community, including cardiovascular problems and respiratory problems, such as asthma.

Operating your wood fire overnight can produce considerable smoke haze, particularly on still nights, or when a temperature inversion keeps smoke from rising. This week, smoke haze in Orange has started to build up.

You can reduce wood-smoke pollution by:

- Only burning small pieces of well seasoned and dry wood.
- Opening the air vents to allow the wood to burn brightly.
- Storing your wood under cover in a dry ventilated location.
- Occasionally going outside to check the chimney it is not emitting excessive smoke.

For more information about wood smoke issues, go to the NSW Department of Health

http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/factsheets/environmental/wood_smoke_pub.html

and

<http://www.environment.gov.au/atmosphere/airquality/publications/breathe-the-benefits.html>.

Sustainable tip for the week - Choosing fire wood wisely!

It is important to buy or use fire wood that has been obtained legally, and doesn't destroy habitat for native wildlife. Only purchase firewood from a certified and licensed firewood supplier, and refuse fire wood that contains hollows that may be used for nesting and sheltering by native animals, such as parrots. There's no need to burn their homes to warm yours.

Green dates for the calendar:

World Migratory Bird Day – May 8-9

National Volunteer Week – May 11-17.