

These Bills Are Killing Me! By Robin Lacey, CZM

With oil more than \$3 per gallon and other energy costs skyrocketing, the winter of 2007 was a budget buster for many citizens of the Commonwealth. Future pricing is uncertain, but there is one thing you can count on: using less oil, gas, and electricity will help both your wallet and the environment. Chances are there are many things you can do to increase the energy efficiency of your home and achieve significant savings.

Where do you start? An energy audit should be the first step to assess how much energy your home consumes and determine steps you can take to make your home more efficient. An audit will reveal where your house is losing energy, determine the efficiency of your home's heating and cooling systems, and may also show ways to conserve hot water and electricity. You can perform a basic energy audit yourself, or have a professional do a more thorough audit. Check with your provider—some companies offer their services for free, and others will perform the audit for a small fee.

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has produced an online *Consumer's Guide to Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy* that presents efficiency information including a section on Do-It-Yourself Home Energy Audits (see www.eere.energy.gov/consumer/). In Massachusetts, the MassSAVE public/private partnership provides free professional audits, rebate offers on recommended energy improvements, and low- or no-interest loans for improvements. Go to www.masssave.com for more information.

While the audit alone does not save any energy, it provides a starting point to tackle your home's energy consumption. The rebates and loan programs offered through your energy providers can help lessen the cost. In addition, the practices and Energy Star products recommended through an audit will not only enhance your home's energy efficiency, lower your utility bills, and increase comfort—by using fewer natural and man-made resources, they help to lessen your impact on the environment.

Links/Sources:

Energy Star www.energystar.gov

U.S. Department of Energy Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy
A Consumer's Guide to Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy www.eere.energy.gov/consumer/

ENERGYguide Home Analyzer www.energyguide.com

NStar Residential Efficiency Home Page
www.nstaronline.com/residential/

Natural Gas Residential Efficiency Programs
www.gasnetworks.com/efficiency/resid_energyaudits.asp

Mass Save
www.masssave.com

Take Your Energy Use by the Reins and Lower Your Bills

By Robin Lacey, CZM

I personally had an energy audit of my home done in the spring of 2006 and was surprised to find that my family's high heating bills were due to lack of insulation (the house is only 50 years old), single-pane windows, and an inefficient boiler. Also, our central air conditioning system was more than 30 years old, so electrical bills were very high in the summer. Based on the audit recommendations, I have replaced 16 windows, air sealed the entire house, insulated the attic and walls in the older part of the house, installed a new 94 percent efficient boiler with an indirect hot water heater, and replaced the ancient air conditioning system and ductwork. As a nice side bonus, I received rebates on just about everything I did. The insulation work was done through NStar and was very inexpensive. Also, much of the work was financed through a \$15,000 no-interest loan provided through MassSAVE. You can find out about all these programs by visiting the MassSAVE website at www.masssave.com.

*We like the Energy Star.
They make less of that
icky stuff that gets into
the water.*

