



Lights off!

The price of electricity is skyrocketing and the only way to reduce that crippling monthly bill is to use less of the stuff. **Nick Dall** shows you how to save electricity in your home.

Since 2008, Eskom's annual price increases have averaged a scary 22%, and there are no signs of the situation improving anytime soon. Reducing your reliance on the national grid also has the pleasant side-effect of softening the blow when loadshedding strikes - it will be back, don't you worry.

The bare minimum

Fortunately there are quite a few interventions which don't cost much and will save you money from day one. If you're not already doing some of them, you must be living in the clouds...

Install energy-efficient lightbulbs: Modern CFL and LED bulbs use between five and 10 times less energy than old-fashioned incandescents and they have to be replaced far less frequently. When you multiply this by the number of lights throughout your house you can achieve some pretty big savings. CFLs are cheaper but they don't last nearly as long or save quite as much electricity as LEDs (about R150 per globe).

Get a geyser blanket: The geyser is the single biggest drain on electricity in your home, so once you've paid to heat the water it makes sense to keep it hot. It doesn't get simpler than a geyser blanket, which wraps around your geyser and should save about R500 a year. A DIY pack that includes the blanket and everything you need to install it will set you back R320 - R380 (depending on the size of your geyser) at www.geyserduvet.co.za.

“ The only way to reduce that crippling monthly bill is to use less of the stuff. ”

Be geyser wise: Set your geyser to 60°C instead of 70°C (any lower is a health hazard). Switch it off when you go away or even install a timer on your geyser (R650 including installation) which turns it on once or twice a day - some people swear by them, although the science isn't quite as emphatic.

JO-ANN STRAUSS



ON SAVING POWER...

I switch off our geyser when we go on holidays/weekends away and have a timer on it to switch it off between 9pm and 5am.



Open-hearth, log-burning fires add a romantic touch to any home, but they are fabulously inefficient for heating large rooms.

Use less hot water: Shower instead of bath; install an energy-efficient shower head (which will reduce your water bills too); choose cold water or energy-efficient cycles on your washing machine and dishwasher; and only put as much water in the kettle as you need.

Buy woolen socks: Heating is another huge expense, which is why you use a lot more electricity in winter. Dressing warmly and keeping active is by far the cheapest way of staying warm, but if you are going to use an electric heater, heat only the room/s you are in, and choose a model which has a built-in thermostat (it switches off when the desired temperature is attained).

Turn appliances off at the plug: Believe it or not your TV, DVD player, cellphone charger and karaoke machine (don't pretend you don't own one) all draw significant amounts of power when they're in standby mode.

Use your pool filter sparingly: Pool filters are surprisingly heavy on electricity and, although your pool shop will advise running yours for 12 hours every day, I get away with about seven hours in the height of summer and as little as three-and-a-half hours in winter. You may occasionally need to top up the chlorine, but it's worth it.

Spend to save

Sometimes you have to bite the bullet and take a short-term financial knock to save yourself money in the long run.

Install a solar-water heating system: Letting the sun warm your water is the best investment you can make but it's not cheap. A fitted solar-water heating system will set you back between R12000 and R20 000 (after the hefty government rebate).

Depending on where you live (and what your hygiene regime looks like) installing a solar geyser can reduce your monthly electricity bill by between 25% and 45%. Which means your solar-heating system will pay for itself in three years... assuming Eskom's prices stay the same (which they won't).

When you consider that the system should last between 20 and 30 years and has absolutely no maintenance costs, it's a no-brainer. From the myriad service providers, choose one that is part of the government rebate programme and has been around for a while.

An experienced installer will take into account your family's needs as well as your home's location and aspect when deciding how many tanks and panels to use and where to put them. Unless you live in Hotazel your existing electric geyser will be left in place to provide a backup heating option when the sun don't shine.



“When you consider that the system should last between 20 and 30 years and has absolutely no maintenance costs, it's a no-brainer.”

With an extra dash of chlorine you can run your pool pump for fewer hours – especially in winter.

Get a closed-combustion fireplace: In the old days a wood-burning fireplace was a romantic and smoky way to keep your home (moderately) warm. But modern reincarnations of old-fashioned cast-iron stoves (the things your great-grandma used to cook porridge on) have eliminated the smoke, ramped up the heating capabilities and retained the romance. I burn my fire for at least six hours every day from May to October and spend about R1 500 on wood for the whole of winter.

These days you can buy a fireplace for under R5 000 which will perform perfectly well (or well over R30 000 on a European import), but you also have to factor in the flue and installation (starting at about R8 000). Whatever you do, don't skimp on installation – a poorly installed fireplace or chimney is a serious fire hazard. Check out www.gcfires.co.za for prices including installation.

Go off grid

If you have R200 000 odd to spare (or are building a new house) installing a system of photovoltaic (PV) solar panels, inverters and batteries may be the best investment you ever make. Depending on how big your home is (and how fond you are of the tumble dryer) this outlay should allow you to become almost entirely independent of the grid.

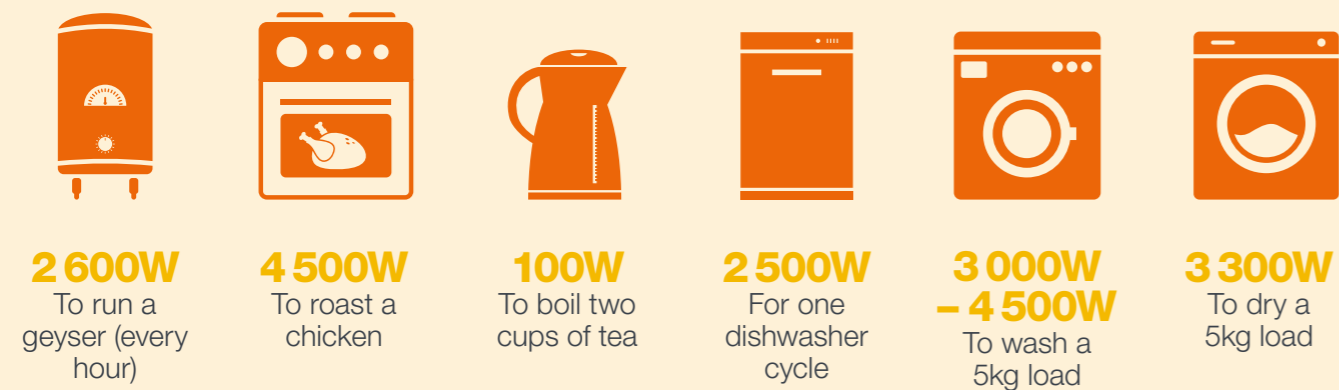
In other words you won't spend a cent on electricity until your batteries need replacing in about seven years' time (new batteries for a R200 000 system currently cost R15 000). Your inverter should last at least 10 years and the panels will be good for around 30 years. And no loadshedding!

Do the maths – it may be worth it if you're not selling any time soon. ■



South Africa gets so much sun you might as well use some of it to heat your water.

THE BIGGEST CULPRITS



These figures are approximate – check the label on the back of your appliance for an accurate reading



USE YOUR SANLAM REALITY BENEFIT

Thinking of going green? No need to do the research yourself. Contact the Sanlam Reality PA on 0860 732 5489 and they will source you quotes on solar geysers and more.