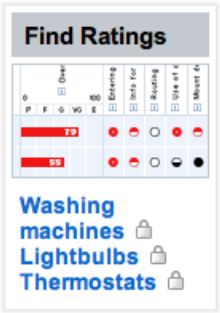
ConsumerReports

Test your energy IQ

What you don't know about energy can cost you

Consumer Reports magazine: October 2012



If you're like the typical American, you know a thing or two about energy efficiency, but you're also leaving serious savings on the table. That's clear from our 2012 Energy IQ Quiz, a nationally representative survey of 1,035 Americans conducted by the Consumer Reports National Research Center. No one got every question right, and only a third answered most correctly. Test your own Energy IQ, then read through our answers to learn the latest efficiency news and advice, which could lower your utility bills by hundreds of dollars.

And don't forget to check out our buying guides to lightbulbs, programmable thermostats, and space heaters.

Which home improvement will usually lower a household's annual energy costs the most?

- Upgrading windows
- Adding insulation to an attic
- Installing light-colored roof shingles
- Sealing all air leaks, including leaky ducts

Slick advertising by manufacturers may be the reason 34 percent of people incorrectly choose windows in this question. Though new windows can save energy, especially double-glazed units with low-emissivity (low-E) coatings, our tests have found that it could take 20 years to recoup the investment.

The swiftest savings come from sealing air leaks in your home's walls, windows, and especially its ductwork, which 33 percent of respondents answered correctly. "Leaky return ducts can also introduce unwanted air pollutants into the home," adds Kathleen Hogan, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Energy Efficiency at the Department of Energy. Duct insulating and sealing are best left to a professional and could lower your annual heating and cooling bills by $400. You can then use a combination of caulk, foam board, expandable sealant, and weather stripping to plug leaks around windows, doors, electrical outlets, and other openings in your home.

Adding attic insulation is often the next best way to save energy. In a typical residence, laying 11 inches of fiberglass or rock wool or 8 inches of cellulose insulation could save up to $200. Cool roofs are designed to reflect more sunlight and absorb less heat. They can trim cooling costs in warm regions, especially if there's conditioned living space directly beneath the roof.

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