



# Times-News

## Ten steps to turn coal into energy savings

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**David Weintraub**  
**ECO NOTES**



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Jeff Barrie's documentary film, Killowatt Ours, dramatically demonstrates the consequences of energy inefficiency on the South. Since 60 percent of our energy use comes from coal in this part of the country, we are all connected in some way to the retrieval and burning of coal.

In the film, we see mountaintop removal and how it damages scenic landscapes, destroys waterways, causes deadly flooding and irrevocably changes communities. We watch children impacted by the preponderance of mercury in the air, a byproduct of coal burning resulting in one in 10 women of childbearing age carrying unsafe levels of mercury in their tissues. Not to mention the epidemic levels of asthma in children.

We follow visitors to the Smoky Mountains National Park who can barely make out the mountains as a result of sulfate particulates from coal-burning power plants. Forty-five of 50 states post statewide mercury advisory warnings that fish are unsafe to eat. Yet our coal-firing ways continue.

How do we contribute to coal burning in our everyday lives? For every kilowatt-hour of electricity we use, which is equivalent to 10 light bulbs an hour or running the air conditioner for 30 minutes, we burn a pound of coal. The average home in the Southeast burns 12,000 pounds of coal a year, 40 percent of that is used just to keep on the lights. If one room in every home in America were lit by Energy Star lighting, it would equal removing 1 trillion pounds of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. A recent success story in the making is the Henderson County Board of Commissioners' decision to build two new green schools which can ultimately save the county millions of dollars in saved energy costs and, if current trends hold, will provide a healthier environment for students with lower absentee rates and greater productivity.

Here's our 10 easy steps to become a modern day alchemist by turning coal into energy savings and environmental preservation:

- Install a programmable thermostat. The devices cost as little as \$20 and usually store at least four temperature settings a day, regulating air condition and heat turn-on times and saving hundreds of dollars annually.
- Insulate. Contrary to what some homeowners think, many houses older than the 1940s are not insulated and buildings constructed before the 1990s are often insulation deficient. Consider blowing insulation in the walls or laying batts of insulation in the attic or using newer insulation materials with better temperature retention such as icynene. Cost savings can be as much as \$7,000 or \$8,000 for an entire house, but certainly a return on an investment and more.
- No extra pane, no gain. A lot of homes lose warmth in the winter and coolness in summer through single-pane windows. Consider replacing single plane windows with top-of-the-line double- or triple-pane ones.
- Check out what North Carolina has to offer. Many government agencies sponsor grant and loan programs to help low- to moderate-income families make homes more energy efficient. Contact Western Carolina Community Action at 693-1711.
- Hire a professional. An energy auditor can help locate many places where air escapes from a house.
- Deep-six the ancient fridge. If you own a refrigerator older than 15 years, get rid of it. Since the 1990s, there have been many advances in energy efficiency for appliances. Replacing an old fridge with a new one can save about \$100 in electricity bills per year.

- Replace incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescents, especially for light fixtures that are used frequently.
- Look for the "Energy Star." The Energy Star program is a government-backed program helping businesses and individuals protect the environment through superior energy efficiency. The initiative certifies products in more than 40 different appliance categories that use less energy, save money and protect the environment.
- Consider turning a brown home into a green home through solar panels to heat hot water, install geothermal heating and more. Contact the WNC Green Building Council about area vendors at [www.wncgbc.org](http://www.wncgbc.org) or 232-5080.
- Plug those leaks. Hot water is a big home-energy guzzler. The temperature on hot water heaters is often set at 140 degrees, but it doesn't need to be more than 120 degrees. And the lower setting can be safer, too, reducing the risk of scalding children. Washing clothes in cold water instead of hot water can save about \$50 a year. New showerheads, if the existing one is more than 10 years old, cut hot water use without any discernible difference in pressure.

Join ECO's Project Green Light to cut energy costs in the home and neighborhood. Churches and community groups can demonstrate a commitment to the environment by joining the Green Light challenge, a friendly competition offering prizes to the winners who cut the most kilowatt hours in the next year.

Don't put coal in the stocking, turn it into a healthy future.

*ECO Notes is provided by the Environmental and Conservation Organization, a nonprofit group dedicated to conserving and preserving the natural heritage of the mountain region through education, recreation, civic action and service. For more information, call 692-0385.*