

Save Plug 'n

by Susan Thomas Springer / for The Bulletin Special Projects

Focus on
your home's
biggest
energy users
to reduce your bills
and your carbon footprint.

It's easy to turn off lights, bundle errands into one trip and put the thermostat down a degree. But it takes a little more knowledge to save energy on major home appliances, both when you buy new ones or use the ones you have.

One energy expert recommends focusing on the two biggest energy users to reduce your energy bills and your carbon footprint — refrigerators and clothes washers.

Refrigerators

"There have been significant changes over the last 15 years in the energy use of refrigerators," said Matt Braman, residential program manager for the Energy Trust of Oregon, a nonprofit organization that works with utility customers to save energy.

In Central Oregon, Energy Trust of Oregon offers services and cash incentives to customers of Pacific Power and Cascade Natural Gas.

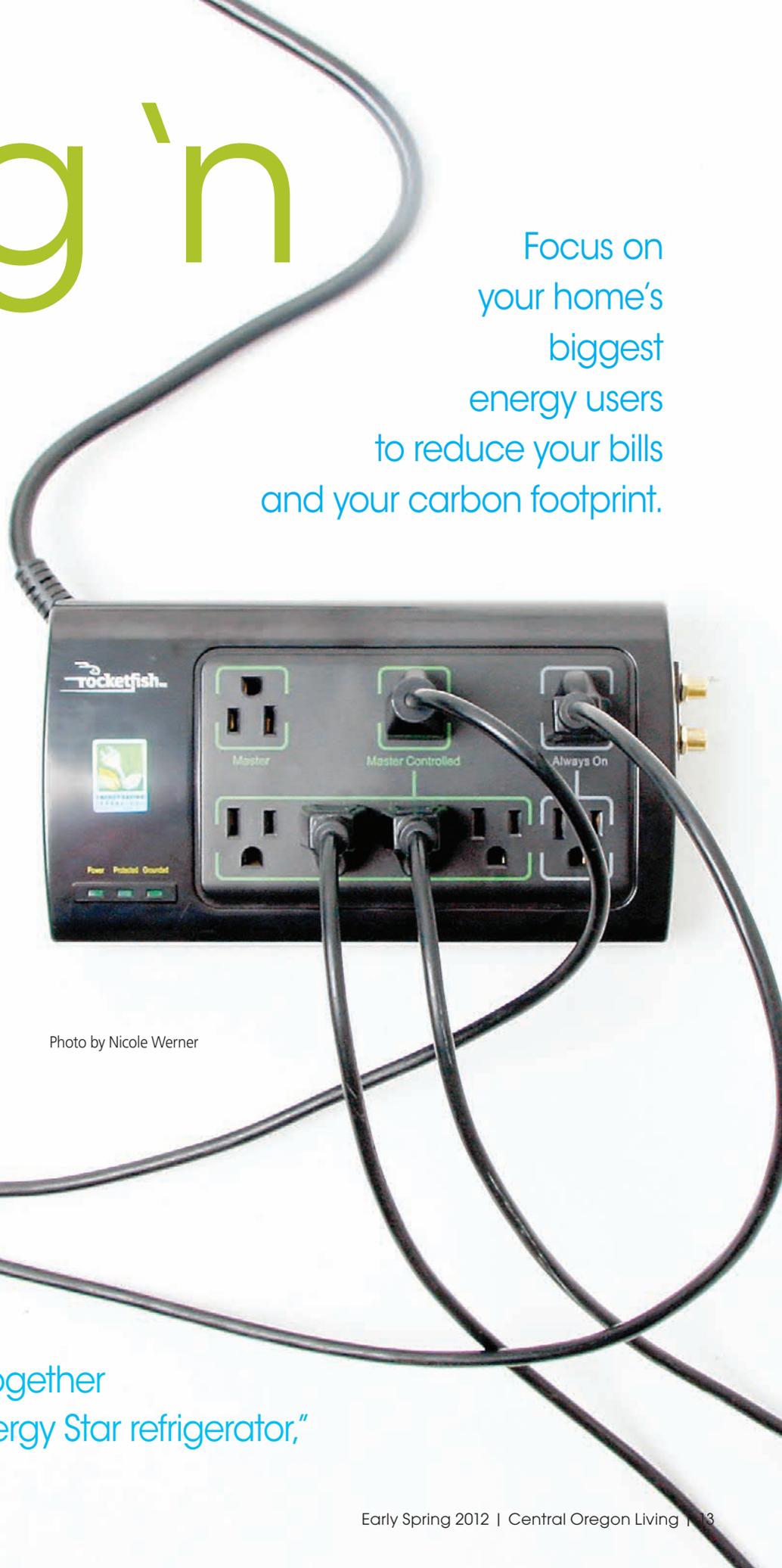


Photo by Nicole Werner

"The television and the cable box together
can use almost as much as a new Energy Star refrigerator,"

Other utilities offer similar incentives.

Braman recommends replacing fridges manufactured before 1993. Energy Trust will remove the old fridge, recycle 95 percent of it, give a \$40 credit for the old one and a \$100 incentive on a new, qualifying refrigerator.

“So not only are you getting that energy hog off the grid, you’re also recycling almost all of the components in it,” said Braman.

Braman said second fridges that people have in their garage can be even older than the one in their kitchen.

“Those are ones that can use easily 100 to 200 dollars worth of energy per year, so those are real good candidates for our refrigerator recycling program,” said Braman, who adds that compares with as little as \$40 a year for a new, energy-efficient fridge.

When buying new, look for the Energy Star label or the Energy Trust seal of approval, which is usually even more efficient than Energy Star.

“Energy Trust works with most major retailers to identify which units are going to qualify for our incentives,” said Braman.

Clothes Washers

Clothes washers have improved a lot too. New energy-efficient washers can use half as much water as old models.

New washers remove more moisture so that dryers don’t have to work as hard. Plus, new formulas of cold water detergents are doing a better job of getting your laundry clean.

“Most of the energy used in the washing of clothes actually comes from heating the water. So washing your clothes in cold water will significantly reduce the amount of energy it takes to wash your clothes,” said Braman.

If you have a top-loading



Photo by Lyle Cox



“Kill-a-Watt is a very handy tool where you can use it to measure energy use at a moment in time or over a period of time.”

clothes washer more than 10 years old, Braman recommends replacing it. He adds that next to showers, clothes washing is the largest source of hot water usage.

Sullivan said clothes dryers can be big energy users. The simple habit of reducing the temperature can save energy.

“We have really dry air here, so if you wanted to save energy by operating the dryer, set it to low heat,” said Sullivan, who usually air dries his clothes.

While individual habits may seem insignificant, when you consider those habits within your community or across the country, they add up.

“Anything you can do to change your habits now will have a big impact overall,” said Sullivan.

Electronics

After reducing energy usage in fridges and washers, the third energy hog may come as a surprise.

Braman said televisions, including new cable boxes with the DVR, can use a great deal of energy.

“The television and the cable box together can use almost as much as a new Energy Star refrigerator,” said Braman.

He adds it’s usually not possible to turn them off, but you can reduce the number of boxes in your house. Also, manufacturers are beginning to make them more efficient.

In addition, the energy use of home offices — with computers, printers and speakers — can add up.

“Some of those things, if they are left on all the time, they could be using significant amounts of power,” said Braman.

Monitoring Usage

A basic rule is that if an appliance is generating heat (whether in use or not), it’s using lots of energy. Appliances such as televisions can be put in energy saver function instead of standby mode. Or, plug the devices into a smart power strip.

Consumers can monitor energy use with Kill-a-Watt, a hand-held device which you can check out from the Deschutes County library.

“Kill-a-Watt is a very handy tool where you can use it to measure energy use at a moment in time or over a period of time,” said Braman.

Braman said consumers in the Northwest are savvy when it comes to buying and using appliances.

“We have a long history of efficiency programs, and there’s more awareness,” he said.

Using such awareness and state-of-the-art monitoring, SolAire Homebuilders in Bend, for example, is accumulating some interesting data about the energy used by appliances. SolAire built a zero-energy home in 2011 and has been monitoring the electricity used by the individual

appliances within it.

“Electronic monitoring data shows that the less expensive, Energy Star-rated appliances use less power and have lower phantom electrical costs than more expensive, better-rated Energy Star appliances,” said Cindi O’Neil, vice-president of SolAire Homebuilders.

In one month, according to O’Neil, the home’s standard electric range costs 2 cents running in standby mode, while a more expensive induction range costs 88 cents per month on standby.

“Similarly, our standard refrigerator costs \$2.80 a month to operate, and a top-of-the line, better-rated refrigerator costs \$3 a month to operate,” O’Neil said.

Energy data like this, O’Neil says, can be obtained through the FIDO Energy Watchdog systems installed on new and existing homes.

For more information on appliances, consumers can check the details of specific models at www.energystar.gov.

Homes go greener with Earth Advantage

Nearly one in three new homes in Central Oregon were built with the color green in mind, each boasting the seal of approval from a local nonprofit that promotes such practices.

“Thirty percent of the newly constructed houses last year were certified by our company in Bend,” said Earth Advantage Institute’s Green Building Consultant Bruce Sullivan, who works with about 50 local builders.

Earth Advantage is a nonprofit organization that works with the building industry throughout the state to implement sustainable building practices. In Central Oregon, two employees advance green building in new homes — Sullivan and Matt Douglas, its builder outreach specialist.

The two have seen a significant increase in green building practices, including more energy-efficient appliances.

“Matt and I work with builders every day,

and we just try to help them make every house a little bit better than the one they built before,” said Sullivan.

Sullivan praises the Central Oregon Builders Association (COBA) as a champion of green practices.

“They’ve been very aggressive in promoting green building, which is a little unique for a home builder’s association, so we’re very lucky to have COBA,” said Sullivan.

Sullivan adds that awareness has increased due to master plan communities that require Earth Advantage certification, including NorthWest Crossing and Tetherow in Bend, Brasada Ranch in Powell Butte, IronHorse in Prineville, and Yarrow in Madras.

“People probably wouldn’t have encountered it if they hadn’t decided to build in one of those communities,” said Sullivan.

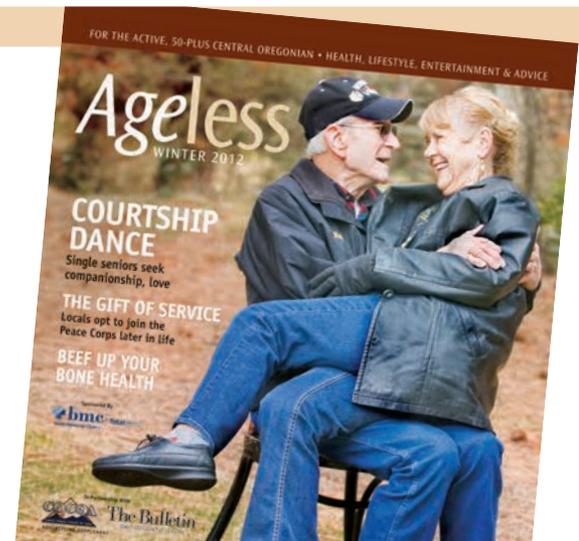
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