

Why is the Electric Portion of My Utility Bill Higher than Normal?

Electric usage varies from day to day and month to month, depending upon a variety of factors including your daily habits, the weather, and the time of year.

Winter Electric/Utility Bills Are Usually Higher

Bills are generally higher during the winter months due to both the increased energy requirements for home heating and fewer daylight hours which leads to increased use of lighting and electronic devices.

It takes more energy to heat your home when the temperature drops.

Heating systems must work harder to warm up our homes during a sudden drop in temperature. Using more heating, whether from furnaces, heat pumps, or space heaters, increases energy consumption and raises utility bills. The more difference there is between the temperature outside and the thermostat setting inside, the harder your heating system will work and the more energy it will use, *even if you don't turn the thermostat higher*. This is especially true for homes that don't have enough insulation, homes with single-paned or aluminum-framed windows, and homes with a lot of air leaks around windows, doors, and plumbing & electrical boxes.

Ways to minimize your energy use during the winter:

1. **Turn your thermostat down a few degrees.** Each degree you lower it can save up to 2% on your heating bill. Set it even lower when you are away or asleep but be sure to keep your house at least 55 degrees at all times to prevent pipes from freezing and to avoid moisture problems.
2. **Use portable space heaters wisely.** If you spend most of your time in one or two rooms, using space heaters to keep those rooms warmer, and turning your furnace down to let the rest of the house stay cooler, can help save energy. This works best if you can close off the rooms you are using, and if you only use one or two space heaters. A typical space heater uses 1,500 watts of electricity and an electric furnace uses 10 times that much.
3. **Get rid of drafts.** If you feel cold air coming in, warm air is escaping. Keep windows and doors closed and use caulk or weather stripping to seal leaks around windows, doors, and plumbing penetrations.
4. **Cover your windows.** Tight fitting, insulated window coverings can help minimize heat loss through the windows. Keep curtains and blinds closed unless the sun is shining directly on the glass.
5. **Check your furnace filters to see if they need to be cleaned or replaced.** Dirty or clogged filters make your furnace work harder, increasing energy usage.
6. **Maintenance of heating equipment.** Schedule regular maintenance for heating equipment for maximum efficiency.
7. **Check your insulation levels.** If your home is poorly insulated, adding insulation will lower your energy bills.
8. **Upgrade your heating system.** If you heat your home with electric resistant heat (electric furnace, baseboards, plug-in heaters, etc.), consider upgrading to a much more efficient heating system.

Common Reasons for Higher Energy Usage During the Winter

Appliance Usage

The electricity consumption of various appliances significantly contributes to overall energy bills.

- **Water Heaters:** Colder temperatures can make water heaters work harder to maintain the desired water temperature, leading to increased electric consumption.
- **Space Heaters:** While space heaters are a convenient way to warm up specific areas, they are often less energy-efficient than central heating systems and can quickly drive up your electricity costs.

Holiday Activities

December and January often involve more cooking, baking, and lighting (e.g., holiday decorations), which increase energy usage.

Stay-At-Home Factors

Spending more time indoors due to weather, remote work, or other factors can lead to higher energy use for heating, lighting, and appliances.

Taking a Long Vacation

If your home is empty for extended periods of time during the winter, you won't necessarily use less electricity. Your daily activities when you are at home generate a fair amount of heat. When you are gone, the lack of activity means your heating system must work harder to keep the house warm.

- **What you can do:**
Set your thermostat at 55 or 60 degrees when you are away.

More People Living in Your Home

If the number of people living in your home increases, your energy use can go up. More people means more showers, cooking and laundry, which can significantly increase your energy use.

- **What you can do:**
Take shorter showers and run only full loads of laundry and dishes. Wash laundry in cold water when possible.

Sudden Spikes in Energy Usage

In addition unpredictable weather patterns, a sudden spike in energy usage may indicate a repair problem with an appliance, heating system, or water heater. If these are not well-maintained or outdated, they will consume more electricity to achieve the same cooling effect.

- **What you can do:**
Regular maintenance and upgrades to more efficient models can help reduce this impact.

Summer Electric/Utility Bills Are Usually Higher

Bills are generally higher during the summer months due to both the increased energy requirements for air conditioning and appliances.

It takes more energy to cool your home when the temperature rises.

The more difference there is between the temperature outside and the thermostat setting inside, the harder your cooling system will work and the more energy it will use. Even a few degrees' difference in outside temperature can lead to a noticeable increase in your energy consumption. This is especially true for homes that don't have enough insulation, homes with single-paned or aluminum-framed windows, and homes with a lot of air leaks around windows, doors, and plumbing & electrical boxes.

Ways to minimize your energy use during the summer:

1. **Turn up your thermostat.** Every degree of cooling increases energy by 6% to 8%. Keep the house warmer than normal while vacant.
2. **Turn off ceiling fans when you leave the room.** Fans cool people, not rooms.
3. **Unplug what is not being used.** If you're planning on being gone for more than an hour, unplug anything that is not needed immediately.
4. **Get rid of drafts.** If you feel warm air coming in, cool air is escaping. Keep windows and doors closed and use caulk or weather stripping to seal leaks around windows, doors, and plumbing penetrations.
5. **Cover your windows.** Tight fitting, insulated window coverings can help minimize cool air loss through the windows. Keep curtains and blinds closed.
6. **Check your filters to see if they need to be cleaned or replaced.** Dirty or clogged filters make your cooling system work harder, increasing energy usage.
7. **Maintenance of cooling equipment.** Schedule regular maintenance for cooling equipment for maximum efficiency.
8. **Check your insulation levels.** If your home is poorly insulated, adding insulation will lower your energy bills.

Common Reasons for Higher Energy Usage During the Summer

Sudden Spikes in Energy Usage

In addition unpredictable weather patterns, a sudden spike in energy usage may indicate a repair problem with an appliance, cooling system, or water heater. If your cooling system is not well-maintained or outdated, it will consume more electricity to achieve the same cooling effect.

- **What you can do:**
Regular maintenance and upgrades to more efficient models can help reduce this impact.

Appliance Usage

The electricity consumption of various appliances significantly contributes to overall energy bills.

- **Refrigerators:** Your refrigerator works harder in the summer to keep food cool in a warmer environment which can increase energy consumption.
- **Fans:** While fans use less energy than air conditioners, using multiple fans throughout your home can still add to your overall energy consumption.
- **Washing Machines:** Wash full loads instead of more frequent operations with only half loads.
- **Pool Pumps:** If you have a swimming pool, running the pool pump more frequently to keep the water clean can also significantly increase your electric bill.

- **Water Heaters:** With more frequent showers, laundry and dishwashing in the summer, your water heater has to work harder, consuming more energy.

Stay-At-Home Factors

Spending more time indoors due to weather, remote work, or other factors can lead to higher energy use for cooling, lighting, and appliances.

More People Living in Your Home

If the number of people living in your home increases, your energy use can go up. More people means more showers, cooking and laundry, which can significantly increase your energy use.

- **What you can do:**

Lower the temperature on your water heater and take shorter showers. Run only full loads of laundry and dishes. Wash laundry in cold water when possible.

Utility Budget Billing Option

The Borough of Ephrata offers a **Budget Billing** option to help residents manage their utility expenses with predictable monthly payments. This program calculates an average monthly payment based on your billing history, covering **electric, water, sewer, and recycling charges**. The amount is evaluated and adjusted **twice a year**, ensuring consistency in your utility costs.

Benefits:

- Helps maintain **consistent** utility bills throughout the year
- Avoids seasonal fluctuations in billing

Eligibility Requirements:

- ✓ Must have **resided at the same property for at least one year**
- ✓ Must have **12 months of clean payment history** with a **zero balance**
- ✓ Must pay **the exact budgeted amount** by the **due date** each month

Important Details:

- **Late Payments:** Late fees apply as per Borough policy; repeated late payments may result in removal from the program.
- **Adjustments:** Your budgeted amount is recalculated **twice a year** and will adjust automatically.
- **Removal from the Program:**
 - If you **fail to pay on time**, the Borough may remove you from Budget Billing, and standard billing will resume.
 - If you **move**, Budget Billing will automatically end.
 - If you **choose to cancel**, you must wait **one year** before reapplying.

If Budget Billing is terminated for any reason, your next bill will reflect the total amount due, which must be paid in full by the due date.

Budget Billing is a great way to take the sting out of the summer and winter months when your electric usage is higher. For more details or to enroll, contact the Borough's Business Office.