

Energy efficiency for your home

Last month, this space featured an op-ed from Georgia Public Service Commissioner Stan Wise advising consumers about “Looking before leaping on solar offerings.” Following this wise consumer advice, and in preparation for the anticipated rush of residential marketing by a wide range of solar installers as the Solar Financing and Free Market Act of 2015 becomes effective July 1, GEORGIA Magazine is revisiting a series of columns published in the magazine in the summer of 2012 for consumers interested in deploying renewable energy in their homes or businesses.

This column from June 2012 focuses on what consumers should do before investing in alternative energy sources. Next month's column will provide information about residential solar options that are available. Local electric membership cooperatives (EMCs) can help their members navigate this decision-making process to arrive at the most practical investment. Be sure to consult with your EMC first.

Before you decide if installing renewable energy-generating sources in your home is right for you, do some homework. Make sure your home is energy-efficient. Why is an energy-efficient home a prerequisite to adding residential renewable energy? Solar energy is free, but the equipment you'll need to harness and use that energy is expensive. Be smart about making that investment by reducing your home's energy requirements.

Start small. Visit your local electric cooperative's website or *TogetherWeSave.com*. At *TogetherWeSave.com*, type in your ZIP code and take a virtual tour of a typical home to find out how you can increase your home's energy efficiency and reduce your monthly electric bill. Make simple changes, such as unplugging appli-

ances, turning off lights and adjusting your thermostat by just a few degrees.

The money-saving calculations at *TogetherWeSave.com* adjust according to where you live, so the dollar amounts you're seeing accurately reflect your co-op's current rate and typical climate. Once you've checked some simple tasks off your list, the next step is tightening up your home's envelope by addressing issues such as:

- **Air sealing**—Reducing air leaks by sealing holes and gaps in your home provides a big return. Your co-op may be able to help by conducting a blower-door test to pinpoint air leaks.
- **Leaky ducts**—Most heating and air-conditioning ducts are not airtight, causing homes to lose 15 percent to 25 percent of the air that should be flowing through them. These leaks make your air conditioner work harder and create air-quality issues.
- **Insulation**—Are your floors and attic properly insulated?

Other elements in your home also have a major impact on its energy use:

- **Heating, ventilating and air-conditioning (HVAC) system**—Have a NATE (North American Technician Excellence)-certified HVAC contractor inspect and tune up your system.
- **ENERGY STAR appliances**—If you are planning to replace any major appliances, choose ENERGY STAR appliances. Today's ENERGY STAR refrigerators use half as much energy as models from the 1990s. However, even the most energy-efficient appliances can cost a lot to operate when they're left on all the time. Read the instructions on the energy-saving features, and turn off the

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Your local electric cooperative is a **TRUSTED RESOURCE** when evaluating solar energy options.

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appliances when they're not needed.

- **Water heating** uses a lot of energy. To save energy, reduce your water heater's temperature; install low-flow fixtures, showerheads and aerators; and use cold water for washing clothes.
- **Lighting** your home with LEDs (light-emitting diodes) uses less energy, saves money and lasts longer.

By taking these steps, you'll save energy and money and have a more efficient, comfortable home. Home energy-efficiency improvements are the least expensive way to decrease your costs and help our environment. These improvements can also help reduce the size and cost of renewable-energy sources that you may consider in the future.

Your local electric cooperative has a staff of energy experts ready and willing to assist you in making your home more energy-efficient and readying it to take advantage of renewable energy.

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