

Berkshire Heating Season Strategies - Plan Now!

Natural gas and electric users may be less impacted by the spike in oil prices, but all of us can benefit from these ideas for reducing heating and energy costs. Some of these strategies require money, some require professional help and all of them require some time to accomplish. There will not be enough emergency heating assistance to help everyone, so plan now for your situation this winter.

Clean and tune:

All heating appliances and chimneys should be professionally cleaned before the heating season starts. This will save you money and make you safer. Dust is an insulator so change your air filters and vacuum your radiators often. Also seal and insulate your heating air ducts and pipes so heat is not wasted in attics and basements.

Close the cracks:

The most important strategy is to make our houses more fuel efficient. We can't trade our house in like our cars on a new model, but we can tune up the house we have by using caulking, insulation and foam to close all the air leaks. Make sure windows and doors fit properly. Consider putting plastic over unused windows and doors. Where possible, increase ceiling or attic insulation, replace single pane windows and doors or install storm windows and doors. Sealing cracks with weather stripping is the single most effective strategy for saving heat.

Turn down the heat:

Consider installing a setback thermostat to turn the heat down when you are not there or asleep. Most healthy adults who dress warmly and are active are perfectly safe in house temperatures as low as 55 degrees. Young children and older family members may not tolerate such low temperatures, though, and will need additional heat in the rooms where they sit or play. Also pipes in outside walls in older homes may freeze on really cold nights. Think of those spots that sometimes freeze and add extra insulation or wrap the pipes with heating tape to prevent freezing. If you run out of heat, remember to drain the house plumbing to prevent burst pipes.

Close off rooms:

In the old days, most houses only heated the rooms that were being used while they were in use. Entirely closing off a section of your home may require the services of a professional. All heating and water pipes in the closed off section have to be isolated from the rest of your water system and drained so they won't freeze.

Bundle up:

Put on extra sweaters and don't forget the slippers. On really cold days, wear hats and scarves indoors to retain body heat. Also use extra sleeping bags and quilts, eat warm, healthy foods and practice other health habits.

Share with a friend:

During really cold spells, consider sharing space and heat with a friend or neighbor. Check on neighbors, especially the elderly who can easily slip into hypothermia at temperatures in the 60's.

Start saving now.

Oil prices are down, so fill your tank now. Put money aside now while it is still warm outside. Don't run your tank dry as this puts dirt in your heating system and don't buy heating oil in at the gas station as this is dangerous.

Alternative Heat Sources:

Electric, propane and natural gas are currently less expensive than oil but can pose risks if not properly installed and used. Check cords and outlets for safety. Oil filled electric radiators with auto shut offs are the safest temporary room heaters to use. If you use other types of heaters, keep them away from people and things that can burn. If you are considering wood heat, make sure your chimney and stove are clean and safe and only burn clean, dry hardwood. Fireplaces without a good insert are usually net losers of heat. Remember Carbon Monoxide (CO) is the silent killer. Install a good CO detector near your bedrooms today.

Green Ideas and other energy saving tips:

Consider installing air or water heat recovery or solar hot water systems. These require a professional and cost money, but will improve indoor air quality and save you money. Studies show that cold water in your laundry works just as well as warm. Choose Energy Star appliances, replace light bulbs with compact fluorescents, turn off dishwasher drying cycles, unplug electronics when not in use or turn off the instant on features, only run full loads in washers and turn off lights when not in use.

Berkshire County Boards of Health Association

P.O. BOX 60, LEE, MA 01238

PHONE: 413.441.9060 *FAX: 888.778.9809 * WWW.BCBOHA.ORG

Berkshire County Emergency Heating Contact Info.

Be Safe, Conserve and Check on others

1. **Call 9-1-1** if someone is in immediate danger.
2. **Call 2-1-1** to ask questions and look for assistance in Massachusetts. The person who answers has access to many of the agencies that provide information or emergency aid.
3. **Call BCAC (Berkshire Community Action Council) 866-216-6200**-Administers the Low Income Energy Assistance Program(LIHEAP) and Energy\$Bucks 866-537-7267 www.energybucks.com,

Special Programs and Community Organizations to contact about heat and energy:

- Your church or service organization might have an emergency fund.
- Mass Department of Housing and Community Development HEATLINE 800- 632-8175
- Salvation Army's Mass Good Neighbor Energy Fund 413-442-0624 (www.magoodneighbor.org)
- National Grid 800-322-3223 to set up budgets and payment plans
- Western Massachusetts Electric (www.wmeco.com) (WMECO) 413-781-4300 or NUStart Program 800-286-5844
- MassSave 866-527-7283 (www.masssave.com) energy audits, upgrades and rebates
- NSTAR 800-592-2000
- Berkshire Gas 800-292-5012 (www.gasnetworks.com) rebates and payment plans
- Home Energy Loss Prevention Service (HELPS) hot line 888-333-7525: energy conservation help including energy audits
- Citizens Energy Corporation 877-563-4645 (www.citizensenergy.com)
- CET - Center for Ecological Technology 800-238-1221 (www.cetonline.org)

Other Programs to look at:

- Women, Infant and Children Program (WIC) (www.mass.gov/wic) 413-445-9429
- Food Stamps: 866-950-3663 (www.mass.gov/dta)
- Mass Dept of Transitional Assistance 413-236-2000 or 413-663-1100
- Homeowner Options Massachusetts Elders HOME 800-583-5337 www.elderhomewoners.org
- Berkshire Housing 413-499-1630 (www.berkshirehousing.com) or 413-499-4887 (Residential Assistance for Families in Transition - RAFT) (www.mass.gov/Ehed)
- Health Services 877-414-4447 (www.mass.gov)
- Basic Banking for Massachusetts (www.masscommunityandbanking.org/guidelines)
- Northern Berkshire Community Coalition 413-663-7588 (www.nbcccoalition.org)
- Mass Mutual Life Bridge insurance program 800-272-2216
- Verizon Link-Up and Lifeline Telephone assistance programs 800-870-9999
- MassHealth (including Medicaid) (<http://www.mass-health-insurance.org>)
- Home Modification Loan Program – Pioneer Valley Planning Commission 413-781-6045
- SHINE – Serving Health Information Needs of Elders 800-243-4636 (www.mass.gov/elder)
- Mass Dept. of Housing and Community Assistance 617-573-1100 (www.mass.gov/dhcd)
- Mass Technology Assistive Loan Program for durable medical equipment 800-244-2756
- Western Mass Legal Services 800-639-1509
- Berkshire Sheriff's Office TRIAD and Senior Safety Net programs 413-443-7220 x 1027
- Project Bread food programs 617-239-2501 and Food Resources hot line 800-645-8333
- Elder Services of Berkshire County 800-544-5242
- MassMedLine (prescription drug help hotline) 866-633-1617
- Property Tax Deferral – Contact your local community assessor's office