

What you plug in can cost you money

You have been doing your best to manage your home energy use. You installed compact fluorescent lamps, invested in a high-efficiency heat pump system and replaced old, less-efficient appliances with those that have received the ENERGY STAR™. As you open your latest electric bill, you can't wait to see the big drop in energy use, not to mention a much smaller bill. That's when it hits you: after all that work to reduce your use, your account still shows significant energy consumption. How can that be?

Have you ever considered your "plug load"? A plug load is the energy consumed by any electric device that is plugged into a socket. Many of these devices consume power, even when you are not using them. That wasted amount of energy, often referred to as "vampire or phantom load," is the amount of energy devices consume while in standby mode or switched "off."

A recent Minnesota field study revealed that consumer electronics and entertainment devices account for 15 to 25 percent of the residential electric load. Today, the plug load is the fastest growing energy load in the residential sector. Here are a few examples of the leading contributors:

- Coffee Maker, 900 watts
- Computer, 200 watts
- Plasma Television > 50-inches, 1,200 watts
- LCD Television < 50-inches, 300 watts
- Standard Tube Television 20-inches, 450 watts
- Gaming Console, 425 watts
- DVD/DVR, 450 watts
- iPod Touch, 2 watts
- Cell Phone Charger, 5-8 watts
- Portable Electric Heater, 1,200 – 1,500 watts
- Aquarium, 50-1,210 watts
- Toaster Oven, 1,225 watts
- Microwave, 800-1,300 watts
- Table Top Lamp, 60-100 watts
- VCR/DVD Player, 30-50 watts
- Inkjet Printers, 100 watts
- Laser Printers, 400-750 watts
- LCD Monitors, 20 watts
- 17 inch CRTs, 65 watts
- Computer Speaker, 5 to 20 watts
- Laptop Computer, 50-120 watts
- Desktop Computer, 65-200 watts
- Water Distiller, 1,000 watts
- Hot Water Circulator, 35 watts plus water heater run time
- Fountains & pumps in decorative ponds, 200 watts
- Dehumidifier, 350 watts

Many of these devices are manufactured with an electronic interface that has a “Stand-By” mode that accounts for 20 percent of the total electricity consumed by plug load.

So, what can you do to reduce this plug load energy consumption and phantom load waste? Here are some suggestions:

- Turn the TV and other connected devices off when they are not being used
- Turn down the LCD's backlight
- Turn on the power saver mode
- Buy a television or computer monitor with a smaller screen
- Reduce light output with other settings
- Control room lighting
- Watch TV together or watch less TV
- Take inventory of all plug loads
- Eliminate unnecessary appliances
- Put gadgets on terminal strips that can be turned off easily
- Disconnect devices everyday
- Use your computer's power saving programs
- Wash clothes in cold water and use extra spin cycle
- Dry clothes on a low temperature setting
- Use insulated carafes to keep coffee hot

Combine a few of these measures to watch your energy savings add up! By understanding your plug load, and with a little effort and a few small changes in how you use your appliances, you will become EnergyWiseSM in no time at all.