Going Green Can Put Some Green In Your Wallet! - Updated: July, 2014

If you are budget conscious, and many of our readers are, then there is a good chance that you cringe every time you get your electrical bill. I know that I did, right up until my last bill. But making a very simple change actually cut my power consumption by more than half. Better yet, my power bill fell proportionately. Given the fact that we are coming into a very expensive time of the year for many families, I thought this money saving tip would help some of our readers out.

You've probably seen the ads on TV for power conservation. These ads often feature fluorescent light bulbs that can be used as replacements for standard incandescent bulbs. I've thought about making the switch for more than a year, but I had been reluctant. I've never been a real fan of fluorescent lighting. It tends to throw off blue and green hues which I don't particularly care for. More importantly, compact fluorescent bulbs (CFBs) are a lot more expensive that standard lights. It's not uncommon for them to cost $7 each or more. This means that if you have a lot of bulbs to replace, your costs can add up quickly.

Even so, I finally decided to take the plunge. I started out by replacing all of the ceiling lights in my kitchen with fluorescent bulbs. I do have to say that at first I, and every member of my family, hated them. As I feared, they throw off a yellow-green glow that I found completely unappealing. They also take a couple of minutes to warm up.

But as bad as I thought they were, I left them in. Within a week, my wife made the comment that she had become used to them. So we replaced a few more bulbs. Then we sat back and waited for our electric bill to arrive.

Neither my wife nor I were really prepared for the bill. I personally thought that most of what I had heard about how much money you can save with CFBs was overblown. I don't mind admitting that I was completely wrong.

Most investors will tell you that if you can make your money back on an investment within two years, it's a good investment. We made our money back from the light bulbs we purchased in less than a month. And I didn't even change every bulb in the house. Only the bulbs that get the most use. In our case, those happened to be our kitchen lights and the lights outside the house which run all night. A grand total of 10 light bulbs.

We didn't change out any of our reading lights. Nor did we change any of the lights in our bathrooms.

We did learn a few lessons the hard way, which I will share with you here. First, for the best quality of light from CFBs, purchase the brightest bulbs you can find. Most of these bulbs have a comparison chart on them. For instance, a package might say that a 7 watt CFB is a good replacement for a 40 watt standard bulb. Don't believe the charts. If you are replacing a 40 watt bulb, try to buy a CFB that is that replaces a 65 watt bulb.

Also, make sure you read the package on CFBs thoroughly. There are several things you are going to want to look for. If you are replacing lights inside the living area of your house, look for "bright white" lights. These will still have a different hue to them, but their light is a lot more attractive that other CFBs. Also, if you are installing your lights on a switch that is dimmable, you need to make sure that the bulb you are purchasing is dimmable. Most CFBs are not, but if you hunt, you can find bulbs that will work on a dimmer.

There are also a couple of important safety concerns that you need to be aware of when using CFBs.

First, not all electric switches will work with them. I actually had a switch that burned out shortly after installing my kitchen lights. When I took the fact plate off the switch, it specifically said "Incandescent Lights Only" on it. This is something that had never occurred to me to look for. If you live in an old house, you may want to have an electrician check your switches and wiring prior to changing out your lights. Unless you have worked with electrical circuits before, you should not attempt to do this yourself. Working with electrical wiring can be quite dangerous.

Secondly, when you dispose of CFBs, they need to be recycled. These bulbs contain a small amount of mercury vapor. As a result, it is illegal to simply throw them in a trash can. Fortunately, retailers are making the recycling process fairly

easy. Many of them now have recycle bins in their stores for CFBs.

If you do decide to purchase CFBs, there are some things that you can do to hold your costs down. Most major hardware stores offer these bulbs individually or in value packs of three or more bulbs. Buy the value packs. These can cut your costs significantly. Also, if you belong to a warehouse discount retailer such as Costco or Sam's Club, you may be able to save money.

Since many CFBs will last for 7 years or more, you shouldn't have to replace your new bulbs any time soon. After you take the plunge, just sit back and wait for your own electrical bill. The only thing that yellow-green hue does to me anymore is remind me of the money I'm saving. Needless to say, I find it a lot more attractive than I used to.

At some point, I'm going to start replacing some of the CFBs with LED lights. LEDs are whiter and brighter but have been prohibitively expensive until recently. A single bulb can cost $30 or more. But on a recent visit to Ikea, I found that they carried some LED bulbs for less than $10 each. At those prices, it may be worth running a test to see if they are as cost effective as the CFBs have proven to be.

by Jim Malmberg

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