

Go Green, Save Money

As concerns about our carbon footprint and the state of the global economy rise, there are simple steps we can take to reduce our environmental impact and save cash at the same time.

Words by **Joanna Tovia**



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Rising costs and a gloomy global economy means many people are doing it tough in Australia and around the world. Household utility bills are eating up more of the household budget, and soaring food prices mean many people have precious little money left over at the end of the month, if any. Families are being forced to scrimp and save in the hope that, in time, things will get better.

The good news is that anyone can save a lot more cash by making a few simple changes to reduce their use of fuel, electricity, gas and water at home. Doing so will not only mean hundreds (and even thousands) of extra dollars in the bank, but it also does the environment a big favour.

“We could be operating our households and businesses so much more efficiently and saving an absolute fortune,” says Jon Dee, founder of social advocacy organisation Do Something! and co-founder of Planet Ark.

Dee has successfully initiated the phasing out of incandescent light bulbs, is leading campaigns to reduce food waste and eliminate plastic bags and bottled water, and has also brought about a ban of phosphates in laundry detergents in Australia. His latest assignment is to convince households, businesses, institutions and government departments to cut back on their energy expenditure by 10 per cent, a figure he says is an easily achievable way to combat rising energy costs.

TAKE THE CHALLENGE

The Do Something! 10% Challenge is being embraced by councils, universities and corporations, which, by making a commitment to cut their energy costs and instigating some simple changes in the way things are done, are saving thousands. For householders, big results can be just as easy to attain – changing a thermostat by one degree, for example, can reduce heating bills by 10 per cent, and replacing incandescent light bulbs with energy savers (aka compact fluorescent lamps) means they’ll be using



How To Save Thousands On Your Appliances

The difference between the energy consumed by efficient and inefficient appliances is remarkable. Check energy and water efficiency star ratings of appliances before you buy them and make your decisions accordingly. CHOICE magazine found that purchasing the most efficient appliances can save you over \$4000 in electricity and water over 10 years, and this is without factoring in future price rises.

WASHING MACHINE
Each year, an inefficient washing machine costs \$156 to run, whereas an efficient one is only \$37. The 10-year running cost savings are:

\$1190

(and paying for) 80 per cent less energy to power a light. It’s worth noting, however, that CFL globes contain mercury, so they should be handled with care (use gloves if broken) and disposed of properly. Recycling is the best way to get rid of them. Find your nearest depository at recyclingnearyou.com.au

A good starting point for people wanting to slash their energy bills is by adding up what they spend on fuel, gas and electricity over a year. The Do Something! website (dosomething.net.au) has a calculator that allows visitors to input data from their bills and car odometer. The calculator then reveals how much they’ll save if they reduce their energy usage by 10, 20 or 30 per cent. Those who pledge to cut their bills by at least 10 per cent can then sign up with an email address to receive monthly tips and incentives to reach their goal.

SWITCH OFF AND SAVE

“When people see how much they’ve spent in the previous year on petrol, electricity and gas, they usually get a big shock,” Dee says. “Once you see the total figures staring you in the face, it’s far easier to take the first steps to save.”

The average household could reduce their electricity bills by up to 10 per cent simply by turning off all appliances at the plug. Just about any product with an external power supply, remote control or lit display will draw power continuously. Australians are estimated to be spending up to a billion dollars a year on this standby energy. Home entertainment products account for about half of standby electricity use in the home.

“The simple solution is to switch off all appliances at the plug when they’re not in use or when you go to bed,” Dee says. “You won’t just save money, you’ll also be safe from the risk of plug fires when you’re asleep.”

For power outlets that are hard to reach, an EcoSwitch could be the solution. This can be connected to an appliance or power board so the switch will be in a convenient, easy-to-reach location. A green light serves as a handy reminder to flick the switch when appliances are still on. ▶

The Top 10 Most Fuel-Efficient Cars (According To greenvehicleguide.gov.au)



Mitsubishi i-MiEV
This electric, four-door hatch has zero drive-time emissions, and charges in seven hours.



Tesla Roadster
Stylish and efficient, this electric convertible travels more than 380km per charge.



Toyota Prius Hybrid
With both electric and petrol engines, the Toyota Prius is a top performer all round.



Lexus CT200h Hybrid
Luxury and efficiency in one, this stylish hybrid is ideal for city driving.



Smart Fortwo Cabrio 52kW
Despite running on petrol, this two-seater convertible uses only 4.4L/100km.

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY

Leaving your computer's Wi-Fi on 24 hours a day is particularly wasteful. Before he measured how much power it used up, Dee admits to being guilty of leaving his on overnight and even when he was away. The changes Dee and his family of four have made across their house mean their power bills are never more than \$150 a quarter.

GO EASY ON THE WATER

Installing a water-efficient shower head is an easy way to save \$50-\$100 in water and energy costs every year. "Most varieties are like baked bean cans with holes in them – that's how efficient they are. Water-saving shower heads halve your use of water, and you only have to heat half as much water as well," Dee explains.

If you're serious about saving money, he suggests limiting showers to four minutes, and to consider installing a solar hot water or heat pump hot water system. Dee is calling on banks to offer low-interest green loans to people wanting to make their homes more environmentally friendly. "How is it that our banks are making billions of dollars profit and giving so little back?" he asks.

Washing your clothes in cold water is another way to save, and hanging them out to dry rather than using a dryer will not only save you at least \$150 a year, but your clothes will last far longer, too.

LET THERE BE (NATURAL) LIGHT

Lighting is one of the most effective ways to reduce your electricity bill, and green lighting options have come a long way from the days when they were expensive and slow to warm up to full brightness. Don't wait for old bulbs to fail before replacing them with energy-saving CFLs, particularly in high-use areas, and make sure you only use the lowest wattage light needed.

The new range of LED lights will save you even more money over time. Using programmable timers and sensors to control outdoor and security lighting will minimise energy consumption, as will solar-powered lights for the garden.



FRIDGE
An inefficient fridge costs \$151 a year, while an efficient one is about \$70. The 10-year running cost savings are:

\$810

TELEVISION
An inefficient TV costs \$183 a year, while an efficient version costs just \$57. The 10-year running cost savings are:

\$1260

DISHWASHER
An inefficient dishwasher costs \$132 a year, whereas an efficient one is about \$52. The 10-year running cost savings are:

\$800

Natural light is, of course, the cheapest option when it comes to your home – installing a skylight in a dim bathroom or hallway can work wonders, as can hanging a large mirror, or painting rooms in light colours. Switch on a lamp instead of illuminating an entire room, if that's all you need, and choose lighter lampshades to prevent the light from being blocked.

IT'S ALL ABOUT EFFICIENCY

"We are wasting so much money because we think it's the normal way of doing things, but there are solutions out there that keep your quality of life just as good; they're not a pain in the bum to do, and once done, you can forget about them," Dee says.

Buying energy-efficient appliances is a no-brainer option if saving money is your main goal. Year-on-year savings soon add up to thousands of extra dollars in the bank (see 'How to save thousands on your appliances' panel from previous page).

Like updating appliances, the up-front cost of insulating your home properly can be daunting, but adding ceiling insulation can reduce winter heating bills by as much as 40 per cent. Factor in the cash you will save if you use air conditioning in summer and the savings can be significant.

Adding up what you spend on petrol every year can be alarming, but getting into good habits can cut costs. Keeping your tyres at the correct pressure reduces fuel consumption, and when it comes time to replace those tyres, why not go for fuel-efficient ones that minimise 'rolling resistance', which can cut your fuel expenses by up to five per cent.

Before buying your next car, Dee suggests going to greenvehicleguide.gov.au to compare the fuel efficiency of vehicles. "I dealt with an MP who was surprised to find out he would have saved up to \$12,000 in the first year on fuel and purchase costs if he'd bought a more fuel-efficient car," Dee says.

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VISIT Businesses are going green too. Find out how one Australian city is improving energy efficiency in office buildings.
KEYWORDS: SYDNEY, GREEN

The Top 10 Most Fuel-Efficient Cars (continued)

 <p>Honda Insight This hybrid uses a third less fuel than other small cars and recharges while on the go.</p>	 <p>Suzuki Alto Travel more than 725km on one tank of fuel in this efficient fuel-run hatchback.</p>	 <p>Alfa Romeo MiTo The MultiAir function ensures 10 per cent less fuel usage and fewer CO2 emissions.</p>	 <p>Mini R56 One Hardtop More than just good looks, the Mini is eco-friendly, too – producing 127g/km of CO2.</p>	 <p>Volkswagen Polo 77TSI Comfortline This fuel-efficient hatchback is also low in CO2 emissions.</p>
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