

A Guide for Renting and Creating Lower Cost Energy Efficient Apartments and Homes

Nearly all renters pay their own energy bills, but few have options relating to the efficiency and quality of the heating and cooling systems, appliances, and windows of their rental. However, there are many steps renters can take to save and manage energy.



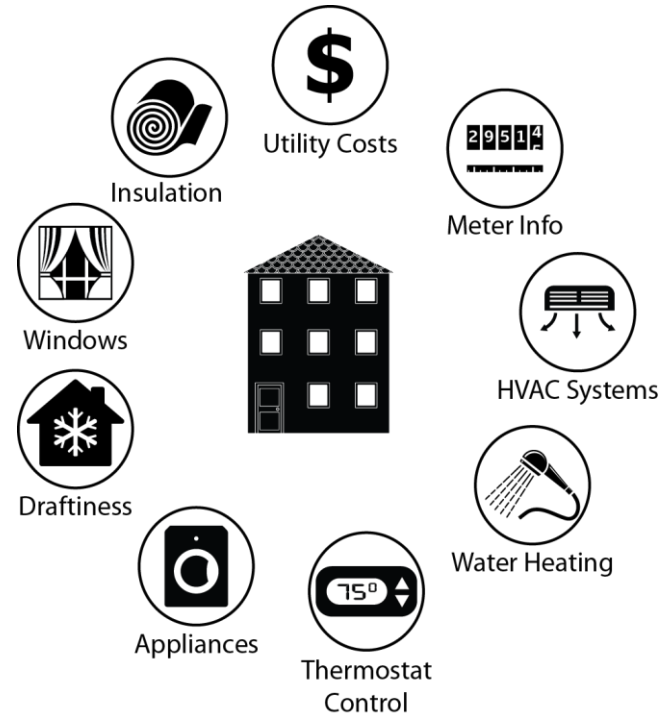
Looking for a rental property? A few key indicators can help you assess the efficiency of the rental. Below is information on “**What to Look For**”, and a checklist of features to investigate when touring a potential new home or apartment “**Before You Sign**” a lease. The checklist will assist you in understanding the amount of energy you may use and ultimately pay for.



Looking to cut energy bills in your current rental? It’s natural to think that it’s not worthwhile to invest in energy efficiency improvements if you don’t own your home. However, there are steps you can take that pay off within a year or two and improvements that you can also bring with you to your next home. Use the “Simple Low-Cost and No-Cost Measures” and “Utility Program Offerings” sections at the end of this guide to reduce your bills quickly.

What to Ask and Look for Before Renting

Saving money and energy can be easy if you know what to look for. Thoroughly investigate the many energy use aspects of a potential rental before you sign a lease.



1. Utility Information



Before signing a lease, ask the building owner which utilities you will be responsible for – e.g. electric, water, oil, and gas (natural/propane). Ask about the cost for each. Everyone will have different utility bills based on individual consumption, but generally in the summer electric bills may be higher due to running an air conditioner. In the winter gas or oil, bills may be higher because of heating.



Utilities often offer budget billing; the utility averages the different seasons (winter-heating/summer-cooling) costs across twelve months and charges you a fixed monthly amount. This will help you budget and eliminate “surprise” high cost bills.



Ask if the building has any energy ratings, labels, or certifications such as ENERGY STAR® Certification, a Home Energy Score, or a HERS Index Rating. These can help illustrate the energy efficiency of a building compared to other similar buildings.

2. Metering



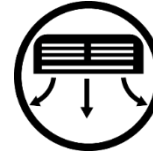
It is important to know if your apartment is individually metered or master metered. When a unit is individually metered, the owner usually requests that you put the utilities in your own name. Master metering, which is more common in large multifamily buildings, means all the units in the building are on one meter. The building owner is billed for utility usage based on the entire building and then divides the bill amongst the individual unit renters. Units with individual meters and thermostats afford the renter more opportunities to save energy. Note that different utilities may be metered in different ways. Your apartment maybe master metered for water and individually metered for electric.



Master metered buildings are great places for building-wide energy efficiency initiatives; it takes everyone conserving to save costs. Starting a building wide energy savings program will

not only help you save money but also builds a sense of community.

3. Heating and Cooling Systems



Ask how old the heating and cooling systems are; older systems (10-15 years old or more) are less efficient and cost more to operate. Ask to see the system: is it clean and does it appear well maintained? Barring a major change in fuel costs, a gas system will be less costly than an electric or oil system in the Northeast. If the furnace or boiler is in a space that is not heated like a basement or garage, operating cost for that equipment or system may be more expensive.



Ask how old the heating and air conditioning system is and where it is located.



A ten year old air conditioning unit may cost 20 to 40 percent more to operate then a new unit. ¹



Which direction does the apartment face? An apartment that faces east or the west may experience higher temperatures during the day or in the summer months, resulting in higher utility costs. Units that are centrally located, with units on each side and above and below will cost less to operate than end or top units.

4. Water Heating



Water heating is typically² the next most costly expense after heating and cooling. Similar to the furnace, depending on age and possibly the location of the water heater, costs

² Keep your Energy bills Out of Hot Water <http://energy.gov/articles/new-infographic-and-projects-keep-your-energy-bills-out-hot-water>

will vary. The type of water heater and the climate in which the heater is operating will determine the life span and efficiency of the equipment. A water heater 10-15 years old will typically cost more to operate than newer more efficient equipment. The type of fuel used to heat the water will also determine operating costs. If the water heater is in a space that is not heated, like a basement or garage, operating costs may be higher.

- Check out this water heater info graphic that will help you understand the different types of water heaters and costs associated with their operation: <http://energy.gov/articles/new-infographic-and-projects-keep-your-energy-bills-out-hot-water>
- Ask how old the water heater is and where it is located.
- Ask the type of fuel used for water heating and check with the local utility to see which the least expensive fuel for your area is.
- Check for any leaking faucets, and make sure these leaks get fixed before signing the lease; signs of leaking water or water damage on the walls or floor, excessive moisture inside may cause mold which could be unhealthy.

5. Thermostat Control

- A programmable thermostat will automatically change the temperature while you are away, at night or just before the morning. Lowering the temperature while you are out and during sleep hours will help you save energy and money.
- Ask if you have thermostat control of heating in your individual unit and if it is programmable. If the thermostat is not

programmable, ask the owner if you or they can purchase and replace the existing thermostat.

- By turning your thermostat back 10 - 15° for eight hours, you can save five to 15 percent a year on your heating bill – a savings of as much as one percent for each degree if the setback period is eight hours long.³

6. Appliances

- Appliances include the stove, refrigerator, washer, dryer, dishwasher and possibly room air conditioners. Inspect the gaskets and coils for tightness and cleanliness.
- What is the age and **operating condition** of the appliance? Newer doesn't automatically mean more efficient: size and fuel matters.
- Ask if the appliances are ENERGY STAR® rated, meaning that they are certified by the United States Environmental Protection Agency to save energy compared to non-ENERGY STAR appliances. Look for this label!

7. Air Infiltration/Draftiness

- Outside air entering the building or apartment or conditioned inside air leaking out of the unit can account for **half** of your annual heating and cooling expenses. Carefully inspect the rental and look for holes or gaps around doors, windows, and attic hatches, and where plumbing, such as radiator pipes,

³ U.S. Department of Energy. "Thermostats"
<http://energy.gov/energysaver/articles/thermostats>

are entering or exiting the unit. Gaps and holes can be filled with foams, caulks, weather stripping, gaskets or tapes; ask the owner to address these issues prior to moving in.



In units with a fireplace, closing the fireplace damper when it is not in use ensures the conditioned air stays inside, essentially closing off a large hole to the outside of the building.

8. Windows



There are many types of windows made of different material such as aluminum, wood, vinyl and fiberglass. Windows may be wood with metal or plastic cladding. Check to see if the windows are double pane, which are more energy efficient than single pane. If the windows are particularly old be sure all windows are operational and have screens or storm windows. (Screens will be useful to keep bugs out when the windows are open in the summer months.)



Consider how you could cross ventilate or “flush” your unit of hot air.



Drapes with or without a thermal lining, window coverings, and block-out shades will help you keep your apartment cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter.



Window shrink wrap, available at most hardware stores, is a great option for very leaky windows.



As a reminder, ask about window fall protection if you have young kids!

9. Insulation

Ask the owner about the insulation levels in the outside walls, ceiling and floor: the more insulation, the better. Very old buildings may be minimally insulated or not at all. However, not all old buildings are inefficient, and not all new buildings are automatically efficient. Some owners may not know how well the rental is insulated, especially in older buildings where the wall cavities have not been opened at any point under their ownership. Another way to approach this question is to ask if the building or unit has been *weatherized*, meaning that the owner has methodically accessed the building for potential energy improvements and has implemented improvements such as air sealing, increasing or adding insulation, upgrading heating and cooling equipment, or installing more efficient appliances.



You may not have many options for adding actual insulation. Placing a book case on an outside wall, hanging tapestries or decorative quilt may help take the edge off cold winter nights.



Area rugs add both insulation and comfort.

Filling in the gaps at the top of your curtains helps keep heat in and cold air out.

Utility Energy Efficiency Programs –

Providing Saving and Comfort

Utilities want you to save energy and will provide incentives to help!

If you are a Pepco customer, check out the energy savings tips Pepco lists on its website at:

<https://www.pepco.com/WaysToSave/ToolsAndResources/Pages/EnergySavingTips.aspx>

Simple Low Cost and No Cost Tips to Conserve Energy and Save Money

Free

- Set computers to go into standby mode after 30 minutes of nonuse.
- Drying clothes? Hang them to dry.
- Set your refrigerator to 36-40 °F and your freezer to 0-5 °F.
- Program your thermostat, or manually dial it back ten or more degrees at night or while you are away.
- In summer, turn off the AC at night and open windows to take advantage of “free cooling.”
- On sunny days, use the sunlight from windows instead of turning on lights when possible.
- Lower the temperature of the water heater to 120 degrees Fahrenheit if possible.

Quick Payoff

- Use energy efficient bulbs such as ENERGY STAR LEDs.
- Wash clothes in cold water.

Take it With You

- Use [energy saving power strips](#), especially on TVs, gaming consoles, desktop computers, etc.
- Shower heads and aerators are also easy ways for tenants to cut their water heating bills. Low flow showerheads should use < 2.5 GPM, faucet aerators should use: <1.5 GPM.
- Invest in ENERGY STAR appliances, lighting, and electronics.

- Consider replacing your non programmable or difficult to program thermostat with a smart thermostat or a learning thermostat that will detect your patterns and program itself.

Resources to Help Renters Save Energy and Money

United States Department of Energy (DOE) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) - Home Energy, Appliance and Lighting Savings:

- www.energystar.gov/campaign/home
- <http://energy.gov/energysaver/articles/tips-renters-and-property-owners>

The Residential Energy Services Network (RESNET) a National Energy Efficiency Rating Organization - Energy Saving Tips:

- <http://www.resnet.us/library/category/energy-saving-tips/>

Conservation Services Group a Northeast Energy Efficiency Services Provider – Home Energy Efficiency Tips:

- <http://www.csgrp.com/homeowners-renters/home-energy-efficiency-tips-energy-info/instant-home-energy-savings-measures/>

A Glossary of Energy Efficiency Terms

<https://www.energy.gov/eere/slsc/glossary-terms>

This guide was developed by the Northeast Energy Efficiency Partnerships, Inc. (NEEP) and adapted for Montgomery County by the Montgomery County Green Bank (<https://mcgreenbank.org>).