

November 2015 EnergyWiseSM Tip: Talk'n Turkey

Okay, I'm talk'n turkey this Thanksgiving; cold turkey as a certified energy manager, that is. My therapist told me that this year, I am not allowed to openly berate my family members every time they do one of those huge, energy-wasting things that always set me off like they did during holidays past. Those confrontations usually led to me being asked to go outside and "efficiently" cool off.

Rather, my psychiatrist advised me to "write-down" the energy-use violation I observe on a piece of paper, tuck the paper in my pocket, and use it to kindle the fireplace at the end of the Thanksgiving weekend. So if you don't mind me practicing my "prescription," here are a few of the major violations from previous family get-togethers.

Like the year when my always-hungry brother, Jimmy, kept opening the oven door to take a peek at what was cooking inside. Doesn't he know that each time he opens an oven door, the temperature inside lowers by as much as 25 degrees? That his curiosity increased cooking time, wasted heat, and delayed dinner by over an hour! Why can't he be like normal people and turn on the oven light to check the turkey and sweet potatoes through the oven window?

Then, there was one year when my niece, Jennifer, camped out in front of the refrigerator because she couldn't decide which of her 30 bottles of salad dressing to put on the table. She would take two out and put one back. Then open the door again, put one back and take two more out. It went on for five minutes! Can't she comprehend that refrigerators and freezers operate most efficiently and economically by keeping the doors closed as much as possible? She could have just taken all the bottles out, since leaving the door open for a longer period of time while taking everything she needed is more efficient than opening and closing it several times.

Oh, and I dare not forget the last family feast at my brother-in-law, Bill's, place. That energy hog thinks BTUs grow in trees! (Okay, they do, but that's not the point.) Even though Bill's hot-blooded, the guy doesn't seem to know how to turn down a thermostat! Instead, with a 25°F temperature outside, he opened every window on the main floor to cool off. I even suggested the night before that he turn down the thermostat a few degrees before cooking started the next morning. The extra heat from the kitchen appliances would have more than compensated for his furnace.

On top of that, the 40 extra guests provided more than enough body heat for the dining room. To efficiently control the situation, he could have turned on his ceiling fans to circulate air and distribute the heat throughout the house. I tried explaining to him that an average person at rest is equivalent to a 100-watt space heater. With all the pointless jumping around Bill did, he was the equivalent to a 300-watt space heater!

And I dare not forget that hot tea craze Granny Johnson went through a few years back. She would stick her tiny tea pot on the biggest burner of her range-top, crank the temperature setting to "high," and walk away, forgetting it altogether after 5 minutes. This drove all of us crazy! First, when cooking on the range-top, she should have matched the size of the pot, pan, or kettle to the heating element. Believe it or not, a six-inch pan on an eight-inch burner will waste more than 40 percent of the energy used!

Here's an even better idea. She could have heated her water in the microwave, used only one-quarter of the electricity, and have had her cup of hot tea before it slipped her mind. Granny Johnson also needs to remember to use lids on pots to retain heat. Food cooked on the stove-top will heat faster when lids are used.

Uncle Wally pulled a good one, too. Ever since he contracted food poisoning from a half-eaten container of potato salad he found on the ground at the State Fair, he's been worried about foodborne bacteria. That Thanksgiving, all of us had no more than put our first servings of the meal on our plates, and Wally immediately removed all the hot serving bowls and stuck them into the refrigerator. Now, I'm all for food safety and not leaving anything out for more than two hours, but Wally just forced his refrigerator to run much longer than necessary by not allowing the hot dishes to cool a little. More importantly, placing all those hot dishes into the refrigerator heated up all the other foods in there to a temperature above their safe-keeping limits. Nice one, Wally! I really enjoyed the warm, runny gelatin mold! Was that salmonella I tasted???

Finally, Aunt Alice took the prize for "Biggest Waster" that holiday, which I hosted in my home. Being a neat freak, she felt the need to hand wash everything twice. In doing so, she used up three bottles of dishwashing soap in two days! I tried politely telling her that a load of dishes cleaned in a dishwasher requires 37 percent less water than washing dishes by hand. I continued by pointing out that additional savings of up to 10 percent can be realized with dishwashers that feature air power or overnight dry settings. Even if she felt only handwashing was appropriate, she could have filled the wash and rinse basins instead of letting the water run continuously and she would have used half as much water.

I elaborated on the dishwasher's opportunity to save even more energy and water by washing only full loads. Finally, I told her she should scrape off dishes rather than rinsing them, since my dishwasher has a disposal unit for food residues. Aunt Alice told me she still felt she had to rinse the dishes before loading them, she should use only cold water so she didn't run up my energy bill by heating water unnecessarily. Even after I explained all of this to her, she did her own thing and I found myself running to the grocery store Saturday morning to replenish my dish soap!

By the end of this Thanksgiving's weekend, I should have plenty of paper to light the kindling! (I think this therapy is already starting to work!) Remember, your local utility and Nebraska Public Power District want to help you make the most of your energy dollar by helping you save energy during the holidays. For more information on saving energy over the holidays or other ideas on how you can make your home or business EnergyWiseSM, along with possible energy efficiency financial incentives, contact your local utility or visit www.nppd.com.