

February 2015 EnergyWiseSM Tip: Benchmark Your Home

After listening to my brother vent for 20 minutes about his high utility costs, I asked if he had ever benchmarked his home. Looking annoyed with me, he asked, “Why would I care about my patio furniture when I’m frustrated with energy bills?” Realizing again why our parents often lamented that he was about as bright as a burnt-out 20-watt incandescent bulb, I knew I would have to back up and expound on what benchmarking is and how easily it can help determine whether he is doing a good job at managing his energy use or being an energy slob.

First, I explained that home benchmarking is the process of comparing your energy performance to something. That something can be your own home’s performance as compared to previous years or it can be compared to the performance of other homes in the area over the same time period.

Next, I pointed my brother to a website that makes benchmarking a home easy. The EPA's Home Energy Yardstick found at:

https://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?fuseaction=home_energy_yardstick.showgetstarted is one of the simplest online tools to use. All a person needs to perform a quick marking is the following:

- Your ZIP code
- Your home's conditioned square footage
- The number of full time home occupants
- Your home's last 12 months of energy bills

Note that conditioned floor area includes rooms inside your home that are heated and/or cooled. This will generally include the main living space, and it could include a finished basement area. It should not include a garage, attic, unfinished basement or storage space. To determine your home's conditioned floor area, you may need to do some measuring.

The Home Energy Yardstick compares a household's actual energy use to similar homes and assigns a score from 0 to 10 (10 being the most energy efficient). Average households score a 5. The Home Energy Yardstick looks at the actual energy use (based on the last 12 months of utility bills) and compares usage to that of similar homes. To ensure homes across the country can be properly compared, the Yardstick uses a statistical algorithm to take into account effects of local weather, home size, and number of occupants on your home's energy use.

You can increase your Yardstick score by improving the energy efficiency of the features and/or equipment of your home or by making changes in the way you operate your home to use less energy. You can revisit the Yardstick each month (when your bills arrive) to see the impacts of the energy efficient improvements you make to your home or changes in the way you operate it.

Chances are, your local public power utility has some additional resources on its webpage to help identify ways to reduce your home’s energy usage. One of these online tools, The Home Energy CalculatorTM, can be found at:

<http://c03.apogee.net/calcs/rescale5x/Question.aspx?hostheader=nppd&utilityid=nppd>.

Your local utility and Nebraska Public Power District want to help you (and even my brother) make the most from the energy they provide. That includes improving the way your home uses energy throughout the year. For more 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.